

2024-25 MHSAA SOCCER COMMITTEE MINUTES
Wednesday, January 22, 2025, 9:30 a.m. – East Lansing

MEMBERS PRESENT

Steve Bossert, Beverly Hills (MIHSSCA)
Aaron Dean, Grand Haven
Kevin Guzzo, St. Joseph (MIAAA)
Chris Hartman, Kingsford
Kyle Lawton, Holland
Ashley Mantha, Saline
Marci Pionk, Ionia (MATS)
Paige Paulsen, Williamston

Chris Riker, Portage
Joel VandeKopple, Grand Rapids
Steve Vissia, Fremont
Lauren Wetmore, Gladwin

MHSAA STAFF

Andy Frushour (Recorder)
Maddie Maloney

The 2024-25 MHSAA Soccer Committee met in the John E. “Jack” Roberts MHSAA building to review topics involving soccer and the tournament series. Due to weather, some members joined via Zoom. The meeting began with a review of the MHSAA decision-making process and the charge of the Soccer Committee. Agenda items were compiled from correspondence, staff, committee members, and the soccer coaches association.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

SAFETY

The 2023-24 NFHS RIO Injury Surveillance Study was provided to the committee. In addition to the Emergency Action Plan requirement for 2024-25, tournament hosts are required to have an AED within visible distance. Athletic trainers report they are commonly asked by officials about the heat and humidity policy (when to play, when to take breaks), and there are often questions about who is in charge of the concussion protocol.

Shinguards were a hot topic during the fall 2024 season. The use of “micro” shinguards have become prominent in the professional game, and its use has crept into club, and now high school, ranks. NFHS rules require NOCSAE-stamped, appropriately sized shinguards. While coaches should require players to adhere to the rule, players still push size boundaries, putting officials in the unenviable position of consistently enforcing the shinguard rule, which often seems like a battle not worth fighting. The MHSAA will continue to administer the rule as written, and work with NFHS leadership on possible alternative rules language that still maintains the safety of the game.

PARTICIPATION

The three-half rule was again reviewed, noting the positive effects it has had with saving many subvarsity teams. Participation at the middle school level has stayed low, but steady, but there was no push for expanding the Limited Team Membership rule. While the recent announcement of the new MLS Next competitive tier could draw more of the elite high school players, the committee does not anticipate a big change in the high school landscape – if anything, it will open more participation opportunities for other students.

SOCCER ITEMS

The 2024-25 *NFHS Soccer Rules Book* reordered the ejection offenses in Rule 12-6-1, listing them in order of severity. This presented an opportunity to the committee review the MHSAA’s Disqualification Rule that states all red cards – no matter the severity – require the same penalty: sit the remainder of the day plus the next day of competition. But are all red cards the same? Should a handball in the box have the same DQ penalty as a player who uses offensive or abusive language? Should a second yellow card be the same as someone who commits violent conduct? The committee reviewed data showing boys soccer with nearly 70% more disqualifications than the next closest sport (football) over the last four years. In fall 2024, 55% of all ejections fell in the

top half of the “new” NFHS ejection list (A-D: two yellows, handling, DOGSO), while the rest were in the more unsportsmanlike bottom half (E-I: language, serious foul play, violent conduct). Upon deeper review, though, most of the 144 second yellows were due to some form of dissent or foul language, and the committee did not want to “save” those students from the next day penalty. Other suggestions included looking at a yellow card accumulation rule, adding additional games for the penalty (like ice hockey), or if a line is drawn make sure any dissent is treated like a traditional red. Changing the DQ rule would put a lot of pressure on officials to accurately report the severity of a card, and in an even more timely manner, but it was ultimately decided that the infrequent red cards for handling were less of an issue than the disrespect of officials. The rule should stay as is.

It is common in soccer for officials to stay on the field during postgame handshakes. In most other sports, however, officials are encouraged to leave the field immediately after the horn sounds. The committee discussed the best practice for the high school game. A postgame fist bump is a special, sportsmanlike touch at the end of a hard-fought game. The presence of officials may even curb potential escalation between teams at the end of the game. In many places, where officials keep their bags near midfield, it might be awkward to ignore the nearby handshakes. But this practice also sets up officials for additional, unnecessary abuse. In some parts of the state officials leave the field immediately after the game, which is also the procedure at the MHSAA Finals. MHSAA staff will discuss this topic with officials associations to get the perspective of the officials.

Additional conversations covered the Limited Team Membership rule as it relates to non-school team tryouts (not just a soccer issue), issuing team bench cautions to the offending coach AND the head coach, and the use of the Golden Goal in the MHSAA tournament.

POSTSEASON TOURNAMENT

The District round of 2024 boys tournament was fully seeded for the first time. Data showed the higher seeded teams winning at an expected rate, with about 25% more games decided by 8 goals or more when compared to previous seasons. It was noted that the lower seeded teams seemingly no longer have a chance at a District victory, and there were reports of some teams with losing seasons not wanting to play their league crossover games at the end of the long season.

Grand Ledge High School and Michigan State University continue to be fantastic hosts of the MHSAA Finals. The MHSAA will monitor the construction of two new professional venues in Detroit and Grand Rapids.

Coaches continue to push for some kind of statewide seeding to balance Regionals and seeding within the Regions to spread out the top teams within the Districts. The MHSAA will continue to provide data to the coaches association, and any proposal of expanded seeding should have details fully flushed out before bringing to the committee and Representative Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

None.