

2024 MHSAA FOOTBALL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, January 17, 2024, 9:30 a.m. – East Lansing

Members Present:

Eric Albright, Midland
Jay Alexander, Detroit
Chris Bell, Lake Orion
Mike Burger, Pittsford
Greg Eichler, Gobles
Kris Ernst, Fowler
Mike Evoy, Detroit
John Guth, Warren
AJ Haduch, Ypsilanti
Jason McIntyre, Mt Pleasant
Andrew Pratley (Guest/MHSFCA)
Allison Sartorius, Waterford

Eric Schugars, Traverse City
Mitch Smelis (Guest/MATS)
Fred Smith, Bangor
Shadwin Spilski, Lapeer
Jon Studley, Alpena
Chris Westfall, Ypsilanti

MHSAA Staff:

Brad Bush
Andy Frushour
Will McKoy
Tricia Wieferich (Recorder)

The MHSAA Football Committee met to review NFHS playing rules, MHSAA regulations, 8-player and 11-player tournament procedures/policies, and concerns involving high school football. The following items were discussed following committee member introductions.

1. 2023 Football Committee Meeting Minutes
2. Football Participation Numbers
3. Football Officials Registrations
4. Sportsmanship & Ejection Data

The committee reviewed concussion data and discussed the upward trend over the past two football seasons. The committee believed one possible cause of the increase could be the result of inaccurate reporting during COVID and a return to regular reporting as we move further away from the pandemic. The committee did not believe that the current concussion requirements and return-to-play protocols warranted any modifications.

MHSAA staff reported the progress made during the 2023 spring football recruiting evaluation camps conducted throughout our state. While the initial rollout conflicted with track Regionals, MHSAA and the MHSFCA felt that week worked best for maximizing the event's effectiveness and garnering the most participation by college football coaches based on the recruiting calendar, along with avoiding regular season track conflicts. Staff will continue monitoring the NCAA recruiting calendar while balancing conflicts with other spring sports.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

GIRLS FLAG FOOTBALL

The committee discussed the increased interest in girls flag football. The committee discussed the NFL's increased support for flag football financially and through local franchise-lead leagues. The committee expressed concern about the impact of girls flag football on the participation numbers in other current girls sports (i.e., volleyball, soccer, track, softball, etc.). MHSAA staff will continue to monitor progress throughout the state.

PLAY CLOCK

The committee discussed the growing concern from football game officials related to the required operation by the back judge of portable/handheld play clock devices that control the operation of visual play clocks in high school football stadiums. Game officials felt this requirement hindered the effectiveness of game officials performing regular officiating duties. Officials requested for schools that operate visual play clocks provide a play clock operator and not require on-field game officials

to run the visual game clock. The committee agreed that schools must provide a play clock operator and remove the requirement from game officials.

8-PLAYER FOOTBALL GAME CLOCK TIMING

The committee discussed the possibility of changing the 8-player timing rules to mirror current subvarsity rules and changing the possession timing rules to assist with perceived longer game times. While the committee thought this could be a possibility in the future, they wanted more data to support the perception while receiving input from 8-player schools to support a future change. MHSAA staff will implement a protocol to collect data on the length of 8-player football games for the committee to discuss further.

PRE-SEASON ACCLIMATIZATION

Currently, the pre-season football acclimatization protocols are only required by the team, not individual students. The committee discussed the possibility of requiring schools to implement those same acclimatization protocols for individual football players who did not start the pre-season with the team. The committee did not believe this requirement was needed and, if put in place, could hinder the coach's ability to prepare their football players.

FINALS PASSES

The committee discussed the number of sideline/bench passes provided to teams who qualify for the football Finals at Ford Field. The committee provided MHSAA staff with valuable feedback for formulating future policies.

FIFTH QUARTER RULE

Presently, MHSAA regulations allow a student to play five quarters in a football week but prohibit a football player from playing five quarters in a single day. The committee discussed the growing desire from smaller schools to allow the flexibility of students playing either five quarters in a week or five quarters in a day. Some expressed concern about the health and safety of allowing students to play five quarters in a day. However, the committee did not feel a policy change would put students at increased risk of injury and supported using either five quarters in a day or five quarters in a week.

DIVISION 8 ENROLLMENT CAP

The committee discussed the possibility of placing an enrollment cap of 250 for Division 8 football. The growing sentiment is that capping Division 8 football at 250 students would protect small 11-player football schools while hopefully encouraging larger 8-player schools over the current 215 enrollment limit for playoff eligibility to return to playing 11-player football. The committee strongly supported this approach and agreed that this change was needed.

11-PLAYER PLAYOFFS

The committee briefly discussed the concept of increasing the number of 11-player football playoff teams from 32 to 48 per division. Chris Bell, Lake Orion AD and head football coach, explained the possible structure of a 48-team playoff system, while MHSAA staff presented the committee with the Fall Update Meeting survey results to facilitate the discussion. The committee agreed that further discussion should occur but declined to propose changing the current playoff system at this time.

MHSFCA PROPOSALS

The MHSFCA leadership brought two proposals from their members to the Football Committee.

1. To adjust the fifth quarter rule to include special team plays. Kicking plays would be exempt from the quarter count in the five quarters per week rule. The MHSFCA believes this is critical for two reasons: helping programs with low numbers maintain subvarsity teams and player safety, which allows regular players on small teams to get necessary rest breaks on special teams provided by players from other levels. MHSAA staff expressed concern that special teams are considered some of the more dangerous plays currently happening in our

game and that excluding special teams plays from the fifth quarter rule would put football players at further risk of injury.

2. MHSFCA provided the committee with Regional seeding data with the hopes of garnering support for moving away from a District playoff process towards seeding the entire region. The committee discussed if Regional seeding as proposed would make for more equitable pairings during the first two rounds of the playoffs, with higher seeded teams getting more home games without significant travel increases. The MHSFCA data shows increased travel, but not substantial enough to discourage moving to a Regional seeding model. The committee agreed and proposed a change to the playoff seeding process to the Representative Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

1. Cap Division-8 to schools with an enrollment of 250 students or fewer (10-2-1).
2. Require schools to provide a designated play clock operator and eliminate on-field game officials from operating the visual play clock at some locations (16-0).
3. Allow students to participate in five quarters in either a football week or on one day of competition (14-1-1).
4. Create four Regions per Division in the football playoffs and create opening round pairings using Regional seeding with 1 vs. 8, 2 vs. 7, 3 vs. 6 and 4 vs. 5 (12-0-3).