

2023 BOYS LACROSSE COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, October 5, 2023, 9:30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Eric Albright, Midland
Aaron Babicz, Novi
Eve Claar, Ann Arbor
Rick DeBlasio, East Grand Rapids (Advisory)
JT Hogan, Spring Lake
Mike Jolly, Warren (Advisory)
JD Kalleward, Portage
Brian Kaminskis, Clarkston
Bill Kennedy, Holland West Ottawa
Rich Kimball, Lansing (Advisory)
Andrew Kransberger, Byron Center

Nick Levanti, Hartland
Nikki Norris, East Lansing
Kelly Salter, Birmingham (MATS-Advisory)
Jeremy Strunk, Grandville
Adam Zarotney, Haslett (MHSLCA)

MEMBERS ABSENT

Justin Thorington, Traverse City

MHSAA STAFF

Cole Malatinsky (Recorder)

The 2023-24 MHSAAA Boys Lacrosse Committee met in the John E. "Jack" Roberts MHSAAA building to review topics involving boys lacrosse and the tournament series. The week prior to the meeting, the committee received the published minutes of the two previous committee meetings.

The committee also received several reports for their review, including the 2023-24 classification of teams and enrollment breaks set in March 2023, and a list of current cooperative programs. As of Oct. 5, 2023, there are 129 teams (66 Division 1, 63 Division 2) representing 178 schools among 37 cooperative programs, with some cooperative program agreements pending. Also included in this information packet was a report of boys lacrosse participation over the past eight years, MHSAA Head injury report data from 2022-23, and preparation materials for preseason season seeding. The meeting began with a review of the MHSAA decision-making process and the charge of the Boys Lacrosse Committee, including the unique functions related to seeding. Agenda items were compiled from correspondence, staff, committee members, and the boys lacrosse coaches association.

The committee reviewed the "Five-Quarter" allowance, which went into effect for the 2023 season following Representative Council approval of the Boys Lacrosse Committee's recommendation. The rule was intended to help programs with lower numbers conduct a subvarsity team by allowing players to participate in both a JV and varsity contest on the same day, provided no player participates in no more than five quarters on that date of competition. Anecdotal evidence from the committee suggests this allowance has been an effective tool for schools on the brink of losing JV teams and even allowed some schools to bring back their subvarsity team. While schools appear to be using the "Five-Quarter" rule successfully and appropriately, committee members expressed concerns about misuse and suggested potential roster size limits be considered for schools to be able to use this allowance. The "Five-Quarter" rule and the intent of this allowance will continue to be a point of emphasis for the 2024 season to ensure that schools continue to use it appropriately.

2023-24 REGIONAL ASSIGNMENTS & TOURNAMENT

One of the unique functions of the committee is its role in preseason seeding and tournament alignments. Committee members received in advance preliminary Regional alignments, maps of each region by division, summary data/results for teams from the 2023 and 2022 seasons, and the stated criteria for seeding the tournament. No changes were made to the seeding criteria for the preseason. It should be noted that one-year performance (2023) was the focus during the preseason seeding, with the committee's preference that two-year performance (2022) only be used to break ties in determining the top 8 teams. The committee ranked the top eight teams 1-8 in each division based on the criteria and placed one seeded team in each Region. The Regions will be finalized pending MHSAA staff securing host sites. Regions, without hosts designated, will be posted on MHSAA.com as soon as possible following the October meeting, including any new programs or cooperatives notifications and approvals. On Wednesday, May 8, 2024 the committee will reconvene and place each team on the bracket based on the written criteria and current season competition played on or before Monday, May 6, 2024.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

POSTSEASON SEEDING CRITERIA

Following concerns during the 2023 seasons with teams playing limited competition against MHSAA tournament opponents prior to the postseason seeding meeting, the committee reviewed the postseason seeding criteria and discussed the addition of a minimum number of contests against MHSAA tournament opponents prior to the established deadline to receive a #1 or #2 overall seed. The committee approved the addition of language within the published postseason seeding criteria explicitly stating that under committee discretion, teams with fewer than eight (8) posted results against MHSAA tournament teams at the time of the postseason seeding meeting could be negatively impacted with regard to Regional bracket and overall seeding, given the effect such a limited schedule has with regard MPR data, head-to-head results, and results against common opponents.

COMPETITION AGAINST OUT OF STATE COMPETITION

The committee reviewed the recent changes to the MHSAA travel rule, and how these changes may specifically impact schools sponsoring boys lacrosse. The allowance for MHSAA member schools to travel up to 300 miles to play an out-of-state opponent has been removed so schools may no longer travel to states like New York or Pennsylvania to compete. Moving forward, MHSAA member schools may continue to compete against teams from Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Ontario – but also may compete against teams from elsewhere in the United States if those competitions take place in Michigan, one of those five contiguous states or Ontario, provided all teams involved in those competitions or events are members in good standing of an NFHS member state association and all MHSAA and NFHS sanctioning requirements are met.

The committee also reviewed Regulation II, Section 15(G) of the *MHSAA Handbook*, which states as a condition of tournament participation, all of a school's boys lacrosse teams must play no fewer than half its boys lacrosse games against MHSAA member high schools.

These reviews set the table for discussion regarding rules and tournament procedures for out-of-state teams participating in leagues or conferences with MHSAA member schools, following the Catholic High School League's (CHSL) admission of five Ohio member schools, two of which sponsor boys lacrosse.

Based on precedence set in other sports, out-of-state schools in a league/conference with MHSAA member schools will be considered MHSAA tournament teams for the purposes of MPR and seeding. So, while those Ohio schools will not be eligible to participate in the MHSAA tournament, they will be included as MHSAA tournament opponents and included in MPR and seeding.

These contests against the Ohio members of the CHSL will not necessarily be considered in-state opponents for the purpose of Regulation II, Section 15(G). Because of the CHSL league schedule and tournament, it is possible that a MHSAA member CHSL school may not meet the fifty-percent requirement to be eligible for the MHSAA tournament. MHSAA members schools may apply for a waiver of any MHSAA regulation, so Michigan CHSL schools will be allowed to request a waiver of Regulation II, Section 15(G), but these waivers must be approved by the MHSAA Executive Committee. The Executive Committee will consider any of these waiver requests well before the 2024 season, with feedback from the Boys Lacrosse Committee included in those deliberations.

Understanding Regulation II, Section 15(G) applies specifically to the sport of boys lacrosse and the Ohio schools were admitted to the CHSL in all sports, not just boys lacrosse, the committee expressed no direct opposition to approval of a potential waiver in this specific situation for the 2023-24 school. Committee members did express general concerns about including out-of-state opponents for the purposes of MPR and seeding, and the formation of new inter-state leagues like the Midwest Scholastic Lacrosse Association, not just in the sport of lacrosse, but all sports, given the recent change to the MHSAA travel

rule, and the MHSAA explore additional measure to prevent the formation of such leagues and encourage in-state competition.

POSTSEASON TOURNAMENT FORMAT

The committee was presented a proposal put forth by MHSAA staff regarding the MHSAA tournament format and seeding. Under the proposal:

The MHSAA Boys Lacrosse Tournament would continue to be conducted in two (2) equal divisions based on school enrollment. Schools would be placed in one of eight (8) Regionals in each division based purely on geographical considerations. Regional champions advance to the Quarterfinal round, Quarterfinal winners advance to the Semifinal, and Semifinal winners advance to the State Championship game.

All teams in an MHSAA geographic Regional would be seeded and placed on a pre-determined bracket line according to MPR (#1 vs #8, #4 vs #5, #3 vs #6, #2 vs #7), rather than placed by the committee under the current format.

Quarterfinal matchups will be determined by matching geographically adjacent Regional numbers (Region 1 vs Region 2, Region 3 vs Region 4, etc.), rather than determined by committee.

The Sunday following the Quarterfinal round, a Seeding Committee would meet to seed the teams advancing to the Semifinal round, determining the Semifinal matchups based on published criteria similar to what is currently used to seed the tournament by committee.

This proposed format more closely aligns with the tournament format and seeding used in other MHSAA sports, and addresses the criticisms and issues faced under the current format. The committee received simulated tournaments using data and results from the past three seasons showing under the proposed format, there would have been no change in the eventual state championship matchup in either Division.

No action was taken regarding the proposal. With such a significant change, Michigan High School Lacrosse Coaches Association leadership on the committee requested time to discuss the proposal with their membership and invited MHSAA staff to present the proposal with additional data from the 2024 tournament at their annual postseason meeting.

NFHS RULES CHANGES

The committee reviewed recent changes and points of emphasis under NFHS playing rules for the sport of boys lacrosse for the 2023 season and the upcoming 2024 season. The committee discussed the eye-black rule, which was a point of emphasis for the 2023 season. Under NFHS rules, eye black (grease or non-glare stripes or stickers) must be a single solid stroke, and may not include words, numbers, logos or other symbols. While this is not a new rule and is consistent across NFHS sport rule codes, committee members expressed frustration that the rule does not appear to be consistently enforced across the different sports. Additionally, the committee discussed inconsistency regarding contact to the head and neck and suggested that head/neck contact continue to be emphasized in the rules meeting for coaches and officials.

MHSAA RECRUITING COMBINES

Coaches on the committee were critical of the spring football evaluation camps presented by the MHSAA in partnership with the Michigan School Football Coaches Association, which were held on dates from May 15th to May 18th, 2023, coinciding with many late-season boys lacrosse regular season contests and MHSAA tournament games. While coaches understood the MHSAA's sponsorship of the event for the purposes of compliance with MHSAA and NCAA regulations, they did not feel it was appropriate for students to choose between participating in a college football recruiting activity approved by the MHSAA or being fully prepared for an MHSAA regular season or tournament contest. The committee recommends the

MHSAA work to resolve this issue and find a date or dates that do not interfere with the MHSAA springs sports calendar.

MHSAA TOURNAMENT VENUES

The committee reviewed venues used during the 2023 MHSAA tournament. Some committee members expressed concerns about host schools not providing basic amenities that should be expected for MHSAA tournament competition, such as locker room access and field set-up prior to the game, and game balls. With the current format of the boys lacrosse tournament, combined with the busy spring calendar, finding schools to host can be exceedingly challenging – the MHSAA is grateful for all member schools that agree to host as part of the MHSAA tournament – but MHSAA staff will continue to work to find appropriate venues and hosts that meet appropriate expectations for our tournaments.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

There were no recommendations to the Representative Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MHSAA STAFF

1. Addition of language within the published postseason seeding criteria explicitly stating that under committee discretion, teams with fewer than eight (8) posted results against MHSAA tournament teams at the time of the postseason seeding meeting could potentially be negatively impacted with regard to Regional bracket and overall seeding, given the effect such a limited schedule has with regard to MPR, head-to-head wins or losses, and results against common opponents.
2. With the upcoming changes to NFHS rules and a significant number of new players coming to the sport, checks involving the head/neck or defenseless players should remain a point of emphasis for both officials and coaches rules meeting.
3. MHSAA staff attempt to find dates for the MHSAA spring football college recruiting combines that do not interfere with the MHSAA springs sports calendar.