

FUNDAMENTALS



Of MHSA Athletic Regulations

A guide for Administrators, Coaches, Parents and Boosters

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*A complete electronic copy of the MHSA Handbook is available at www.mhsa.org.
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1 – In-Season and Out-of-Season Regulations

The separation of school programs from out-of-season contests/teams/leagues should be clear and irrefutable. This section provides definitions of what is considered allowable activity within the season and what is allowed out-of-season.

The starting and ending dates for any season for any MHSA athletic activity are determined by the MHSA Executive Board, and those dates for each school year are published in the MHSA Handbook and on the MHSA website at www.mhsa.org.

| In-Season Contest/Activities | Out-of-Season Contest/Activities |
|--|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Involvement</u></p> <p>Schools have total control of program.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Involvement</u></p> <p>Schools or school groups (e.g. Booster Clubs) cannot be involved with out-of-season events in any way (which includes interschool contests/scrimmages between June 1-July 31).</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Responsibility</u></p> <p>Schools are responsible for enforcing all MHSA rules and regulations including equity principles and for funding their sanctioned programs.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Responsibility</u></p> <p>Participants are not affiliated with your school for these events. The school is not (and cannot) be responsible for any aspect of these events including funding, equity principles etc.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Insurance</u></p> <p>School insurance and MHSA catastrophic / concussion insurance cover participants.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Insurance</u></p> <p>Participants are not covered by school insurance or MHSA catastrophic / concussion insurance.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Monies – School Accounts</u></p> <p>Monies for in-season events are housed in school accounts.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Monies – School Accounts</u></p> <p>Monies for out-of-season events cannot be housed in school accounts (IRS regulations also apply).</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Amateur and Award Rules</u></p> <p>Participants must follow the MHSA Awards Rule and Amateur Rule.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Amateur and Award Rules</u></p> <p>Participants must follow the MHSA Awards Rule and Amateur Rule.</p> |

Items of note:

- Schools do not have the responsibility or liability for students participating in out-of-season contests or events. Because of this, schools are not responsible to provide funding or to enforce equitable out-of-season events for their student athletes.
- Schools, and coaches for that matter, hopefully are not under pressure to provide for and fund out-of-season events; the responsibility and decision to participate are the parents' and students'.
- These rules and regulations strongly support diversified activity participation and negate the risks for student athletes who specialize. These risks include social isolation, overdependence, burnout, manipulation, injury and compromised growth and maturation. (Source: [Early Sports Specialization: Roots, Effectiveness, Risks](#) – Robert M. Malina Department of Kinesiology and Health Education, University of Texas at Austin).

2 – Coaching Rules, Camps, Invitational Tournaments & Other Activities

Coaching rules for all MHSA coaches are defined in the MHSA Rules and Regulations. There are distinct differences between team sport parameters and individual sport parameters.

Team Coaching Rule – Basketball, Football, Soccer, Softball and Volleyball

The team coaching rule is suspended from June 1st through July 31st. This means a coach of a team sport can coach his/her players anytime, anywhere, during this period. ***During this period a team can scrimmage against another team without violating the out-of-season contest requirements (renting facility etc.) Practice, competition, and facility use during the coaching rule suspension from June 1 through July 31st are not covered by MHSA insurance (liability, catastrophic, concussion, etc.).***

The team coaching rule is in effect from August 1 - May 31: No out-of-season contact allowed except for the one-on-one provision.

Students **cannot be required to attend** out-of-season practices, camps or contests.

Individual instruction is acceptable out of season on a one-to-one basis [one athlete per coach(es)] if it is voluntary. *Required* instruction on a one-to-one basis out of season cannot be mandated of any student. The intent of allowing one-on-one instruction is to provide the opportunity for a student to improve his/her skills if he/she requests assistance. Individual instruction cannot occur during open gym/field.

Coaching for Individual Sports – Cross Country, Golf, Swimming, Tennis, Track & Field and Wrestling

Coaches of individual sports are not affected by the team coaching rule. However, *required* instruction outside the high school season as defined by MHSA cannot be mandated of any student.

Students **cannot be required to attend** out-of-season practices, camps or contests.

Open Gym Defined

Open Gym/Field for MHSA sanctioned sports is an arrangement whereby the school's facilities are scheduled for volunteer play ***for all the currently enrolled student body or non-secondary students within the school's attendance area who are not enrolled in another district.*** Any open gym that is conducted as a sport-specific offering, i.e. boys' basketball, is also considered gender-specific. Boys' and girls' open gyms cannot be conducted together.

Open gyms do not violate MHSA rules if they are conducted according to the following guidelines:

1. The open gym is open ***to any currently enrolled student body or non-secondary students within the school's attendance area who are not enrolled in another district who are interested in attending.***
2. There is NO instruction during the open gym, whether by a coach or anyone else.

3. Coaches may supervise open gyms, but they cannot instruct, organize drills etc., or participate with the students.
4. There is no organized competition, such as established teams participating in round-robin competition etc.

There is no such thing as an open gym during the sport-specific season (i.e. no volleyball open gym during volleyball) or during the allowed coaching window of June 1-July 31. *Other than* during the season or the June 1-July 31 window, open gyms can be held on Sunday if the school district allows.

Specialized Camps, Invitational Tournaments & Other Events

Any student may participate in specialized camps, invitational tournaments and other events in all sports so long as the program and the student's participation meet the following requirements:

- A. No student shall participate in a specialized sports camp, invitational tournament or other sporting events in which any of his/her coaches are involved except from June 1 through July 31 of each calendar year. (This rule does not apply to individual sports.)
- B. If a coach employed by the school or a coach who volunteers in the school's athletic program conducts a specialized camp, invitational tournament or other event independent of the school district and uses school district facility(ies), the coach must follow the district policy on facility use including paying the normal rental fee and providing insurance coverage.
- C. An MHSAA member school, its booster club or other school-related group may not sponsor or have any part in any way in financing a specialized camp, invitational tournament or any other event. A school, booster club or other school-related group paying a coach for conducting a specialized camp, invitational tournament or other event would be in violation.
- D. The MHSAA Award Rule and the MHSAA Amateur Rule must be followed.

The following options are in compliance with the specialized camp rule:

- ◆ A student's parents pay the camp fee and the expenses for the student's travel and room at the camp.
- ◆ A student babysits, mows lawns or holds some other job to earn his/her own money to pay for the camp fee and expenses.
- ◆ A student works at a school fundraising opportunity (such as a concession stand) and is paid by the hour, earning his/her own money to pay for the camp fee and expenses. Records which detail the student's earnings should be kept.
- ◆ A local business or individual donates money to pay the camp fee or other expenses for a student or students to the individual or non-school related fundraising group. NOTE: this is allowable provided the MHSAA Amateur Rule is met in its entirety, specifically item d. which states that a student may not knowingly accept payment for excessive expenses. It is not permissible for an athlete to receive money for unidentified or unspecified expenses. Records and documentation should be maintained.

- ◆ A group of parents conducts a fundraiser to offset expenses for students to attend a camp. NOTE: this is allowable provided the MHSA Amateur Rule is met in its entirety, specifically item d. which states that a student may not knowingly accept payment for excessive expenses. It is not permissible for an athlete to receive money for unidentified or unspecified expenses. Records and documentation should be maintained.

The following are **violations** of the specialized camp rule:

- ◆ A booster club pays the camp fee or other expenses for a student or students.
- ◆ A school supplements the expenses for a camp by providing transportation such as buses or bus drivers, and the expenses for the bus/bus drivers are not reimbursed by assessing a fee to the individual students.
- ◆ A school helps sponsor a camp by waiving the rental fees for school facilities or by failing to adhere to district policies regarding use of facilities, equipment, insurance etc. (if there are any).
- ◆ A school houses or administers funds that have been raised by outside groups for the purpose of conducting out-of-season events such as invitational tournaments, specialized camps or other similar events.

Items of Note:

- School uniforms/equipment may be used, if the school allows.
- Provided a student's coach(es) are not involved and the school/booster club is not, in any way, sponsoring a invitational tournament or other event and provided all general rules are met, a student may attend a invitational tournament or other event at any time during the year.
- It is strongly recommended that the group organizing the event(s) draft a disclaimer reviewing these points, distribute it to the athletes, secure parental permission to participate, and disavow any sponsorship by any participating players' schools.
- Use of district buses by outside groups must be addressed within the local district policy.

3 – Eligibility is a Must!

Students must meet a variety of eligibility requirements in order to participate in MHSA athletic activities. Here is an Eligibility Quick Check for athletics:

- 1) Is the student enrolled in at least 20 hours per week (4 classes, ½ credit each) and in attendance (receiving instruction and/or supervision in the bricks and mortar) for at least 10 hours per week?
- 2) Is the student academically eligible? Did he/she pass 20 hours of prepared class work the preceding semester? (A first-time ninth grade student is exempt.)
- 3) Is the student semester eligible? Eligibility consists of eight consecutive semesters after enrolling in the ninth grade (semesters accrue whether enrolled or not).
- 4) Is the student age eligible? He/she is ineligible if turning 19 before August 31st.

- 5) Has the student graduated or earned his/her GED or HiSET? If so, the student is not eligible for any level of competition.
- 6) If the student meets all the above requirements and he/she is a transfer student will he/she be varsity eligible? Examine each part of the transfer rule, specifically the language which states that a student who transfers without a parental move is ineligible to participate in a varsity Association Contest for half the number of P.I. days in the current school year of the school to which he/she transfers from the date of enrollment (first day he/she attends classes) in the school to which he/she transfers.

In addition to the By-Law requirements listed above, other rules and regulations affect participation.

Please note the following:

- Before participation in any practice or contest at any level a physical examination must be performed using the MHSA form.
- Before participation in any practice or contest at any level the concussion acknowledgement form with required student-athlete and parent/guardian signatures must be on file.
- The minimum number of practices for the specific sport must be completed, and the initial required practices for each individual must be completed as a comprehensive, regularly scheduled team practice with the full coaching staff.
- Sunday practices and contests are strictly prohibited.
- Only students who meet all MHSA eligibility requirements (enrollment, age, semesters, academics, physical examinations etc.) are eligible to practice with and participate on member school teams. Exception: students who are eligible in every way except academics may participate in practice if the school allows.
- No award exceeding one hundred dollars (\$100.00) in value shall be given per event in any MHSA sanctioned sport in recognition of that a student's achievement or participation in any interscholastic activity. An event is defined as a sports camp, an invitational tournament/meet, a post season recognition function (i.e. sports banquet), or a fund raiser or similar function. Cash cannot be awarded. A single Association Contest is not considered an "event" for the purpose of this rule. Special awareness functions (i.e. pink week) are included as defined events with the following limitation: merchandise retained by students in conjunction with awareness events is restricted to disposable items such as basic t-shirts, socks, headbands/wristbands and similar items. Violation of the award rule will render the student ineligible in the MHSA-sponsored sport or activity for which the student received the award. See the MHSA Handbook for additional information regarding the **AWARD RULE**.
- All contestants in the Montana High School Association must be amateurs. To remain an amateur, the student may not accept remuneration for participation, receive donations or gifts outside of the MHSA awards rule, or knowingly accept excessive expense allowances. See the MHSA Handbook for additional information regarding the **AMATEUR RULE**.

4 – Fundraising

Boosters and booster clubs play an important role in high school activities programs. That role continues to expand, and the MHSAA encourages the involvement of local communities. Here are some key issues that schools and boosters should address in order to maintain compliance.

Ultimately, it is the individual member schools that must comply with the MHSAA By-Laws, Rules and Regulations. Before beginning any function or event that impacts your local activities programs all applicable rules should be evaluated.

Voluntary Contributions

The soliciting of voluntary contributions is prohibited at any Association contest. Unless approved by the MHSAA Executive Board, raffles or similar fundraising are prohibited at playoffs, championship games, post-season tournaments, post-season meets, and/or post-season festivals which are under the direct supervision of the Executive Board.

General Fundraising

Some of the more frequently asked questions received by MHSAA concern fundraising for equipment, merchandise and other goods or services.

The following scenarios are in compliance:

- Parent/Booster/Donor/School Groups may raise funds to purchase equipment for a team if the school agrees to accept, to inventory and to maintain possession of the equipment purchased.
- Parent/Booster/Donor/School Groups may raise funds to purchase meals while traveling if the school agrees to accept and to manage such funds and meals are part of the district's policy. A district's meal policy may also contain a "cooler clause" which allows parents or others to provide packed meals for the team(s) while traveling. All practices concerning meals while traveling must be addressed in school policy.
- Parent/Booster/Donor/School Groups may conduct fundraisers that allow students to earn money individually, provided that only students who actually work are compensated and the compensation is commensurate with the work completed (i.e. number of cars washed, number of discount cards sold) or with the number of hours worked. The students may choose to utilize the funds for merchandise etc.
- Schools may provide training apparel for practice and/or workouts that will be fully depreciated and have no intrinsic value at the end of the season. These items may be provided by the school and/or its boosters, including general or team fundraisers, provided that the items are school-approved and are supplied on a gender-equitable basis. Allowable items are limited to one of each of the following: practice shirt, practice shorts, spandex, tights and a pair of socks.

Please note: All of the above are permissible contingent upon all gender equity rules and standards being met.

The following scenarios are violations:

- Parent/Booster/Donor/School Groups raise funds to buy travel shirts, jackets, shooting shirts, polo shirts or other merchandise that the individual students keep (other than the training apparel noted above).

- A member school, its booster club or other school-related group sponsors or finances a specialized camp, invitational tournament or any other event.
- Parent/Booster/Donor/School Groups raise funds in order to give *cash in any amount* to students for any reason, including but not limited to supplementing or providing their meals on the road.
- A member school, its booster club or other school-sanctioned group uses fundraised monies for a pre-game team dinner for the players, coaches and/or families.

5 – Gender Equity

Ridgeway Settlement Agreement

The Ridgeway Settlement Agreement, found in the MHSA Handbook, is the result of federal case law involving the MHSA and all its member schools. The RSA addresses significant issues in achieving and maintaining gender equity, including:

Number of offered sports
 Coaches and coaching salaries
 Publicity and recognition
 Team support, such as assemblies, spirit squads, pep bands, half-time performances, programs etc.
 Scheduling of contests and practices, including assignment of officials
 Uniforms, equipment and supplies
 Transportation
 Trainer and training facilities
 Boosters and outside resources

All schools must comply with the following:

u. **Booster Clubs.** A school district shall affirmatively encourage booster clubs and similar groups of fans to devote comparable attention to the promotion and encouragement of female and male sports. The district shall not give significant assistance to any private organization which aids, benefits, or services athletes in the district on a sex discriminatory manner, unless for each organization which supports the athletes of only one sex, and to which the school district gives assistance, there is a comparable organization which supports the athletes of the other sex to which the school district gives comparable assistance.

Any outside resources, i.e. booster club donations, fundraisers, donations by local businesses, contributions by community members etc., are considered “booster” funds. A school does not have to receive the donations through an organized “booster club” in order to apply this standard of equity. For the purpose of equity, any outside resource that is donated to the athletic fund is considered “booster” support.

Outside resources must be allocated in a comparable fashion. To be considered comparable, the funds don’t necessarily have to be exactly equal in dollar amounts. “Comparable” means that the impact on the programs is fair and equitable.

Specific interpretations regarding compliance with the Ridgeway Settlement Agreement are available by contacting the MHSA office.

Additional MHSA Policies

SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY

The MHSA believes that all individuals should be treated with respect and dignity. Students should be able to participate in MHSA sponsored activities in an environment that is free from sexual harassment and sexual violence. Each member school is responsible for taking such action and enacting such policies as may be necessary to address incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence and to ensure that an environment free of such prohibited conduct is maintained. Any member school which sponsors or tolerates such activity is subject to expulsion from the MHSA.

MONTANA OFFICIALS ASSOCIATION POLICY ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION AND VIOLENCE

The MOA believes that all its members should strive to provide a healthy, safe and appropriate environment for athletic competition. This philosophy dictates that each individual involved with interscholastic competition be treated with respect and dignity. An integral part of a contest official's role is awareness of what behaviors or practices are considered unacceptable. The following information identifies what is considered wrongful conduct, both on and off the contest arena and said conduct is hereby prohibited.

6 – Noteworthy Items

In addition to the previous topics, there are several MHSA regulations to note:

DRUG/ALCOHOL POLICY

The MHSA prohibits any use and/or possession of tobacco, alcohol or other mood-altering drugs during competition. Violation will cause the coach or participant to be disqualified from further participation in that event.

RETURN TO PLAY AFTER INJURY

A. Return to Play:

In accordance with the Dylan Steigers Protection of Youth Athletes Act, an athletic trainer, coach, or official shall remove a youth athlete from participation in any organized youth athletic activity at the time the youth exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion. The youth cannot return to play until he/she is evaluated by a licensed health care professional and receives written clearance to return to play from the licensed health care professional.

In addition, the MHSA also requires that an athletic trainer, coach, or official shall remove a student-athlete from participation in any MHSA activity at the time the student exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a serious injury. The student cannot return to play until he/she is evaluated by a licensed health care professional and is cleared by a licensed health care professional, although written clearance is not required for serious injury other than concussion unless mandated by the local school district.

B. MHSA Policy in Accordance with State Legislation:

Each (high) school district and all youth organizations in this state offering organized youth athletic activities shall adopt policies and procedures to inform athletic trainers, coaches, officials, youth athletes and parents or guardians of the nature and risk of brain injuries, including the effects of continuing to play after a concussion.

C. Coach Education and Concussion Awareness:

Each MHSA coach (head, assistant and school-approved volunteer and including cheer coaches) must complete the "NFHS Concussion in Sports" course each year. The course is available at www.nfhslearn.com.

The course must be viewed before the coach has contact with student-athletes in his/her respective sport and viewed after May 1st for the subsequent year. The school should restrict any coach from coaching until the course is completed or the school district is in violation of Montana State Law.

D. Student-Athletes' and Parents' Awareness and Notification:

Schools shall distribute to each student-athlete and his/her parents or legal guardians the information provided to the schools by the MHSAA (acknowledgement form with required signatures, parent information, athlete information and available resources) before the student participates in an MHSAA sport. The student-athlete and parents/legal guardians must sign the acknowledgement form on the front page after verifying they have read and understand the information regarding concussions. The acknowledgement form must be retained on file by each school. The information with signature sheet cannot be distributed and completed until after May 1st for the next school year. The student and parents/guardians only have to complete the information once per year and it must be completed before the student practices or participates for the first time in a given school year.

MHSAA SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

The ignition or the discharge of fireworks, firearms, explosives, incendiary devices, or flammable materials of any kind is strictly prohibited at all MHSAA regular season and post season events. Event managers are authorized to restrict the use of any material or device(s) deemed a safety risk to students, fans, officials, or personnel.

The use of drones (UAS), for any purpose, is strictly prohibited at all MHSAA events (regular and post season). This prohibition applies to all fields of play, courts, arenas, mats, gym floors, pools, and includes a ban on the entire facility being used as part of the MHSAA event, including stands and parking areas.

The MHSAA prohibits the burning of any incense (sweet grass, herbs, candles or other flammable substance) inside any school or venue that hosts MHSAA events because of the risk of fire or violation of fire codes. Any pregame rituals/ceremonies may be performed offsite.

MHSAA JEWELRY POLICY

No jewelry, which includes visible body piercing objects, shall be worn in any sport. This MHSAA rule supersedes any NFHS rules that permit jewelry. Any piece of jewelry that is visible at the start of or during a contest is in violation of the MHSAA Jewelry Policy. Religious medals must be taped to the body and under the uniform. Medical alerts must be taped to the body so they are visible.