

2015 MHSA and NFHS Changes and Information

For the 2015 season, below we have listed the major NFHS and MHSA Rule changes and also some other important MHSA football safety issues. Please contact Brian in the MHSA Office if you have any questions.

NFHS Major Rule Changes

(2-20-1c) Spearing Definition Revised - Continuing the focus of risk minimization, the definition for the illegal helmet contact act of spearing was revised. Spearing is an act by any player who initiates contact against an opponent at the shoulders or below with the crown (top portion) of his/her helmet.

(9-4-3g) Excessive Contact Added To Unnecessary Roughness - With an emphasis on risk minimization, the unnecessary roughness provisions were expanded. No player or nonplayer shall make any other contact with an opponent, including a defenseless player, which is deemed unnecessary or excessive and which incites roughness.

Major NFHS Point of Emphasis - Risk Minimization

Football is a game with the stated objective “of one team carrying or passing the ball across the opponent’s goal line or kicking the ball through the opponent’s goal by a place kick or drop kick. The game is won by the team which accumulates the most points.” NFHS Football Rules Book, Rule [1-1-1](#).

While this may sound like a simple concept, the game of football has changed with the addition of new offensive and defensive schemes. The blocking and tackling techniques used by high school teams have placed an emphasis on expanding the length and width of each play, resulting in more opportunities for unnecessary or excessive contact to occur between players. As the game of football continues to evolve, coaches, players, game officials and spectators must respect the simplicity of Rule [1-1](#) and commit to keep the game as safe as possible for all participants.

Coaches should continue to educate their players about the risks of unnecessary or excessive contact regardless of whether or not the contact occurs during a legal block or tackle. While the committee does not believe players are coached to make unnecessary or excessive contact with opponents, coaches should clearly instruct players to avoid such unsafe contact. Risk minimization applies equally to players on both teams.

Players need to have respect for the game and their opponents. Any action which includes identifying and taking aim on an opponent who is not aware of any pending contact increases the potential for serious injury to one or both of the players and must be avoided. If the contact is judged as flagrant, the offending player will be disqualified and, in most states, will miss the next contest. Players can’t help their team be successful if they are not in the current or future contests.

Game officials need to be aware of situations that are likely to produce unnecessary or excessive contact. Blindside blocks, peel-back blocks, and airborne receivers attempting to secure the ball oftentimes provide windows of opportunity for these potentially dangerous contact situations to occur. Players leaving their feet (launching) and initiating contact with opponents should be penalized immediately as unnecessary or excessive contact.

Spectators, players and coaches should not promote nor celebrate any act that endangers the safety, health and welfare of an opponent. Players of both teams should always be treated with the utmost respect. The safety, health and welfare of all players should be everyone’s priority.

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What is Excessive?

While the NFHS Football Rules now expressly preclude conduct that is “excessive” and “unnecessary,” the rules have always barred efforts to injure or “take out” an opponent. Situations involving contact that exceed what is usual, normal or proper must to be eliminated from the game.

Considering this potential for serious injury, it is critical that those situations involving unnecessary or excessive contact on players are eliminated whether or not that contact is otherwise deemed legal. While unnecessary or excessive contact can occur between any players, special attention must be given to those players whose focus of concentration makes them especially vulnerable to injury. The “glamour” associated with these types of hits must be removed in order to minimize risk for all participants.

Another area where contact may be deemed excessive is where players heed the old adage provided by coaches, "Play until you hear the whistle!" The whistle rarely causes the ball to become dead; it only confirms a player's action that has caused the ball to become dead (knee on ground). Playing and hitting until the whistle blows can cause unnecessary contact to opponents who have begun to “let up.”

Situations where momentum has slowed or stopped and there is a group of players making the play and someone comes in and drills the pile could be prevented by a timely whistle. Even in the event of a “slow whistle,” such conduct should be penalized. In addition, coaches and players need to be aware that this type of contact is unnecessary, unwarranted and is against the rules

While a contact may be legal, analysis and sound judgment must also determine whether the hit was unnecessary or excessive. Coaches and game officials must work together to minimize risk to players from unnecessary and excessive contact by proper coaching from coaches and assessment of penalties by game officials.

Major MHSA Rule Changes:

Practice Rule Change - The initial required amount of practices for each individual must be completed as a comprehensive, regularly scheduled team practice with the full coaching staff present.

Participation Limits: No football player shall be allowed to participate in more than **Eight (8)** quarters per week (Sunday to Sunday) nor in more than two (2) games within a 48 hour period. In the past, players have been allowed 10 quarters per week, but in an effort to reduce exposures to contact, the Executive Board reduced the number of quarters per week to 8.

Also, it is recommended that if multiple games are played on the same day, then players who participated in both games should have a limited role (i.e. only play on special teams) in one of the two games.

Football Practice Contact Limits - During the regular season and post season, football practice per team shall not exceed more than ninety (90) minutes of contact practice per week. During the initial twelve practices (the first two weeks of practice only) one intra-squad scrimmage is exempt from the ninety (90) minutes of contact.

The MHSA adopted USA Football's “Levels of Contact” for the purposes of defining contact in MHSA football practices: and here are the Definition of Levels of Contact:

- Air - Players run a drill unopposed without contact.
- Bags – Drill is run against a bag or another soft-contact surface.
- Control – Drill is run at assigned speed until the moment of contact; one player is pre-determined the 'winner' by the coach. Contact remains above the waist and players stay on their feet.

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- Thud – Drill is run at assigned speed through the moment of contact; no pre-determined "winner." Contact remains above the waist, players stay on their feet and a quick whistle ends the drill.
- Live Action - Drill is run in game-like conditions and is the only time that players are taken to the ground.

For the purposes of this rule, "contact" will be defined as drills run at the Thud and Live Action Level. Drills run at the Air, Bags and Control level would not be considered contact.

Interpretation - A team may continue to dress in full pads for practice, but may only participate in "Thud" drills, "Live Action" drills and game time simulations no more than ninety minutes per team per week. It is assumed that when players are in shells (shorts, shoulder pads, and helmets) no contact or simulations will occur. A team may participate in "air," "bags," and "control" drills and simulations at any point.

Other important MHSA football safety issues:

- **Practice Requirements** - No individual shall play in any association contest until he/she has a minimum of twelve (12) days of football practice and at least one practice session per day on twelve (12) different days.
- **Acclimation Practice Time** - The first three days of football practice will be a period of acclimation with no contact and no pads.
- **Fitting Helmets** - Coaches must recognize the importance of properly fitting the helmet on each player.
- **Inspecting Helmets** - Inspect all helmets closely and look for any helmets that need reconditioning. Remember all helmets manufactured prior to 2005 cannot be reconditioned.
- **Helmet Warning Labels** - NFHS Football rules require that NOCSAE labels be affixed to the Outside of the helmet and each coach should review the warning language with players.
- **Heat and Hydration** - Enclosed with this Activity News is a new article from the National Federation of State High School Associations Sports Medicine Advisory Committee for coaches and administrators about heat acclimatization and heat illness prevention.
- **Sideline Barriers** - MHSA Rules and Regulations require schools to "erect sideline barriers for all football, soccer, and softball fields during contests."