



THE OFFICIAL WORD

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A Publication of the Montana Officials' Association

Phone: (406) 442-6010 www.mhsa.org

MOA COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE

We are off to a great start and much of that is due to the commitment and support from our officials across the state. The postseason for fall is just around the corner, the fall regular season has gone well, and we hope for good weather for our fall postseason events.

The 2025-26 school year marks a significant step forward for the MHSА/MOА in the area of technology. I recently came across a quote that resonates with our journey: "Change is hard at first, messy in the middle, and gorgeous at the end." This year, we've transitioned to Arbiter for much of our school and official management software. While navigating new technology can be challenging, we're committed to delivering a more efficient and effective platform—and we're confident the results will be worth it.

Additionally, keep an eye out for a brand-new MHSА website launching in October. We're excited to unveil a fresh, modern design that not only looks great but also improves functionality for our membership.

Rules Interpreters – The MHSА/MOА added rule interpreters for many of our sports. We put this change into place and added rules interpreters in for all of our sports.

Here are our current MOА rules interpreters and MHSА staff liaisons:

- Baseball – Craig Struble, mhsabaseballrules@gmail.com – MOА Official from Kalispell and the MHSА Staff Liaison is Scott Wilson swilson@mhsa.org
- Basketball – Rob Tesch, mhsabbrulesinterp@gmail.com – MOА Official from Billings and the MHSА Staff Liaison is Greta Buehler gbuehler@mhsa.org

- Football – Travis Huntsinger, mhsafbrulesinterp@gmail.com – MOА Official from Bozeman and the MHSА Staff Liaison is Scott Wilson swilson@mhsa.org
- Soccer – Scott Lockwood, gscott423@gmail.com – MOА official from Helena and the MHSА Staff Liaison is Greta Buehler gbuehler@mhsa.org
- Softball – Rock Rayl, rockrayl@msn.com – MOА Official from Great Falls and MHSА Staff Liaison is Amy Bartels abartels@mhsa.org
- Swimming – Merle Gunderson, mtgunders@outlook.com – Swimming Official from Great Falls and the MHSА Staff Liaison is Kip Ryan kryan@mhsa.org
- Track & Field – Liza Dennehy, liza.dennehy@gmail.com – Track Official from Butte and the MHSА Staff Liaison is Kip Ryan kryan@mhsa.org
- Volleyball – Norma Stene, steneng80@gmail.com – MOА Official from Billings and the MHSА Staff Liaison is Kip Ryan kryan@mhsa.org
- Wrestling – Joe Sol, joelansol@gmail.com – MOА Official from Missoula and the MHSА Staff Liaison is Scott Wilson swilson@mhsa.org

This process has worked very well for the past couple of years, and we will continue this in the future. We have been able to add great information to our memos and our rules interpreters have provided excellent leadership in their sports. The rules interpreters will serve a 4-year term with the option to renew at the end of that.

We are gearing up for the postseason in all MHSА/MOА fall sports. Please work closely with your local pool, regional directors, and MHSА staff liaisons to ensure clear communication regarding the hiring of postseason officials. We appreciate your efforts and look forward to continuing to work with you. Best wishes for the remainder of your season.

We recognize there is important work ahead, and we are excited to collaborate with you to address challenges and build on our successes across the state.

NFHS Network – Continuing in partnership, the MHSА and the NFHS Network are excited to build on the success of the past years of high school postseason broadcasts. Once again, we added an excellent option to each official's membership. For a small fee that is included in registration each year, each official now has full access to watch all games broadcast on the NFHS Network. The NFHS Network will video stream live almost all MHSА regular season games (Varsity and JV), MHSА postseason games, and MHSА state championship games/meets in numerous sports throughout the entire year. The games will be available by subscription payment and can be accessed through www.mhsa.org.

Great things happen when administrators, coaches and officials work together. Let's keep this going for the rest of the school year.

We are looking forward to a great postseason. Give us a call if you have any questions.

Brian Michelotti, MOA Commissioner

2024-2025 MOA Officials of the Year

The NFHS/MHSА Officials of the Year exemplify the highest standards of ethical conduct and moral character. Through their dedication, professionalism, and commitment to fair play, they have made significant contributions to MHSА member schools. Their outstanding service sets a powerful example for others and reflects the core values of the NFHS and the MHSА.

Montana Official of the Year- Pat Armstrong – Heart Butte
Basketball Boys' – Clayton Zerbe - Frazer
Basketball Girls' – Vinny Castro - Billings
Baseball – Craig Berube - Laurel
Football – Joe Merrick - Helena
Soccer Boys' – James Maxwell - Bozeman
Soccer Girls' – Jill Donahue - Missoula
Softball – Kenny Gonzalez - Hamilton
Volleyball – Norma Stene - Billings
Wrestling - Nathan Alexander – Dillon

Joel Fuhrmann – Region 2 Regional Director MOA Football and Basketball Official

My name is Joel Fuhrmann, MOA Director of officials for region 2 (Missoula area). I am entering my third term on the board and look forward to continuing making officiating better in the state of Montana.

Thank you for being an official in the state of Montana! You are appreciated no matter if this is your first year joining MOA or if you have been officiating for a while now.

Each official matters, and the only way we can continue to have high school athletics in Montana is by having officials, so again, thank you for being an MOA official.

Thank you to the pool leaders in all sports! The countless hours you put in behind the scenes to make sure that your pool runs efficiently is noticed. As pool leaders we know that you have a lot of extra areas to manage on top of staying up to date with the rules/mechanics of your support. You are constantly dealing with schools for scheduling, making sure that your pool members have completed the required clinics, and most likely trying to manage your full-time job.

Thank you to my fellow regional directors! These ten other men and women, put in countless hours to make officiating better in the state of Montana. As you know we meet at least twice a year to deal with business of the MOA. In these meetings, we read and look at every proposal that is submitted to us before acting.

Recruitment is a huge item for the regional director's board. The MHSА/MOА office has sent posters to all member schools and colleges for a direct recruitment campaign here in Montana. We need to continue to get more people involved in the games. Many regional directors have been involved in different recruitment activities in their area. Please do what you can to help explain and share why we need more officials in the state of Montana.

Until next time, THANKS again for stepping up and being an official in Montana!!

MOVING?

Update your demographic information on your Arbiter account. Most of the problems experienced by officials not receiving MOA information including books, clinic information, etc. could be avoided by ensuring that your information is current. If your information changes close to the season, please email the MOA office at abartels@mhsa.org to ensure that your information is correct.

WINTER SPORTS EXAM DATES

Basketball and Wrestling- New Officials, Reinstating Officials, Apprentice, Certified and Master Exams

Opens November 1 – December 3, 2025

*Only Renewed Officials are required to test prior to the deadline.

Exams for all sports are administered exclusively online on your Arbiter account. If you are registered to take the exam watch for instructions to come prior to the testing.

NOTE: If you wish to take the upgrade exam you must notify the MHSa office, in writing, at least seven (7) days prior to the day the test opens. A request for upgrade form is available on the MHSa website under the forms section of the MOA tab. Please contact Amy Bartels with those requests. Upon receipt of your upgrade request, your name will automatically be added to the test list if everything is in order. If there is a problem with your request, we will contact you via email. Please remember that upgrading will be denied for a one-year period for **failure to:** 1) complete the required number of study clubs; 2) view rules clinics prior to the published deadline; 3) pay annual MOA dues 4) complete yearly concussion training prior to the published deadline or 5) receive a favorable evaluation from your regional evaluation committee. NO EXCEPTIONS will be made for late forms turned in.

WINTER RULES CLINICS

The MHSa/MOA rules clinics are again being provided in an online format. A detailed information sheet explaining the procedure for accessing these clinics will be sent with the winter sports mailing in mid-October. If you have any questions, please contact the MHSa office. Please note the clinics must be viewed no later December **3rd, 2025**, or for new officials before participating as an MOA official. All MHSa Rules Clinics will be available on your Arbiter account.

Failure to complete rules clinic(s) by the published deadline may result in a loss of rating and potentially render an official ineligible for postseason assignment.

CONCUSSION TRAINING

The online concussion course must be viewed **every year**, after June 1st, for an official to be eligible for the coming school year. **The deadline for viewing the course will coincide with the deadline for viewing the rules clinic for each sport, whether you will officiate by that date or not.** For officials who work more than one sport, you must complete the concussion course by the rule's clinic deadline for your first sport of the year. The concussion course must be completed only once per school year, but it must be completed before officiating any high school scrimmage or game. The penalty for not completing the

concussion clinic by the deadline will be immediate suspension from the MOA until proof of concussion training is produced. Also, as with rules clinic deadlines, *if you fail to complete concussion training prior to the published deadline, you may incur a loss of rating and loss of eligibility for postseason assignment.* **An MOA official, by Montana state law, cannot work any scrimmage or contest until the concussion clinic has been viewed.**

NFHS Books

NFHS Books – All NFHS materials including the NFHS Rule Book, NFHS Case Book and in some sports the Officials Manual will be physically mailed to each official. The Officials Manual may be mailed to the pool for pickup at study club meetings. An electronic version of the NFHS Rules Book will be available through the MOA. Book information will be sent for winter sports beginning November 1st and each Monday for new registrations. Spring sports will be emailed March 1st. The NFHS digital books have been revamped by Ref Reps and will be a new application from previous years. Please watch your junk folder for any NFHS communications.

REPORTING EJECTIONS

Reminder - Officials in **all sports** must report, in writing, ejections of coaches, students and spectators. These reports must be submitted to the MOA office within **24** hours of the incident. If we do not receive the reports in the appropriate time frame, we cannot send the report to schools in a timely fashion. Reports that are delayed are in violation of MOA rules, so please submit them within 48 hours of the incident. They may be emailed to abartels@mhsa.org. Forms are available on the MHSa website at www.mhsa.org under MOA/Forms or [click here](#).

EJECTION PROCESS & PROCEDURE

Please remember it is important, in most situations, to talk briefly with the other official or with other members of the crew about ejecting a participant. Sometimes this allows time to reflect on the situation and gather other viewpoints, if appropriate. It is vital to get the correct number, and name, if possible, of the player and to record that number. After you eject a participant (coach or player), use the proper reporting process per your sport's rules and execute the ejection. Remember to inform the coach whether the ejection was for unsporting conduct. Make sure you understand who can remain on the premises and those who cannot. If a spectator must be ejected from the premises, the official must first contact the contest administrator, and **the administrator** must remove the spectator from the premises. Use law enforcement if appropriate and available.

It is never acceptable for the contest official, after a contest is finished, to review a tape or film of a game or get together

post-game and change or overrule an ejection after it is issued. Sport-specific and MHSA rules do not allow ejections to be overturned by game officials. It is also wise not to discuss your ejection with school personnel, parents or the media. Simply use the proper procedure in reporting and enforcing the ejection, report the ejection to the MHSA within 24 hours and direct any questions to the MHSA or your local regional director after the incident. Refrain from commentary on the MHSA ejection rule and how it applies to students or coaches or add your opinion regarding the conduct that was displayed. We need only the simple facts of the ejection and a brief explanation of the incident.

VOLLEYBALL INFORMATION AND RULES CLARIFICATIONS

Jewelry:

All jewelry shall be removed, except small, secured jewelry (stud or post). No jewelry shall be permitted below the chin. String bracelets, commemorative bracelets and body jewelry are considered jewelry and are not permitted. Taping over jewelry is not permitted. A medical alert shall be taped to the body, and the alert may be visible. Religious medals and/or other religious items shall be taped to the body and worn under the uniform. Remember that tape can't be used to cover jewelry. The Daith piercing for migraines is an earring and it's considered to be jewelry if it is not a stud, therefore illegal unless approval has been given by the Executive Director and the coach has a letter stating such.

Another issue that frequently comes up is body paint or glitter on the skin or in the hair. The rule states that players should not wear body paint or glitter on their hair, face, uniform or body.

Reminder – Hair control devices:

In an effort to allow a practical means of controlling a player's hair, provided the item used does not pose concern of injury to the player, NFHS Volleyball Rules state head and hair devices must adhere to the following: hair-control devices and other adornments in the hair that are securely fastened and do not present an increased risk to the player, teammates or opponents are allowed; headbands made of soft material and no more than 3 inches wide may be worn in the hair or on the head; head coverings worn for religious reasons are not considered hair devices; must be made of non-abrasive soft materials; and must fit securely; head coverings worn for medical reasons require state association approval. If a legal item worn in the hair becomes loose and falls to the floor and this becomes a problem because the contest is being delayed resolving the problem, the R1 may call unnecessary delay, and the player must correct the problem before returning to play.

FOOTBALL INFORMATION

Process for Hiring Postseason Officials in Football

One question that is always asked when postseason play arrives is how officials are selected for the playoffs and state championship games. Here is how the selection process works for football:

The hiring of football officials for the postseason playoffs is a collaborative effort between the MOA office and each of the eleven MOA regions. Coaches do not vote on these officials, but towards the end of the season, the MOA local pools verify availability and rank each official in their area. When the playoffs begin, the MOA office determines geographically which football officiating pool would be appropriate to cover each round of the playoffs. Then the MOA office receives recommendations from the MOA Regional Director or his designee about crew assignments for each game. After all this input is gathered and evaluated, the MOA office assigns the most qualified and available officiating crews for all five of the levels of football games in Montana. **Starting this year, MOA Regional Directors or football pool leaders will put the crews for their assigned games into Arbiter.** This process has worked effectively in assigning well-qualified officiating crews for all classes for the past several years.

New this year, the Class A conference has agreed to play all play-off games on Friday night unless mutually agreed to play on Saturday afternoon. Also, pools working Class AA football play-off games will have the option to use a 7-person mechanic for the semifinals and championship games when available.

SOCCER INFORMATION

Postseason Information

Soccer postseason contests will begin in October.

Class A Playoff Structure

- October 13-18 – First Round
- October 24-25 – Semi-Final Round
- October 31-November 1 – Championship Games

Class AA Playoff Structure

- October 21 – First Round
- October 25 – Quarter Final Round
- October 28 – Semi Final Round
- November 1 – Championship Games

The MOA office, using geographic considerations and recommendations from pool leaders, will assign officials for all soccer playoff and championship contests using a list of available officials.

BASKETBALL INFORMATION

Basketball related information for the 2025-26 season can be found at the links below:

- [2025-26 NFHS Basketball Rules Changes](#)
- [2025-26 NFHS Basketball Points of Emphasis](#)
- [2025-26 NFHS Comments on the Basketball Rules](#)
- Other basketball-related information can be found on the basketball page of the MHSА website.

WRESTLING INFORMATION

- A 2-lb weight allowance will now be given on January 1st. There will be no additional allowance on February 1st.
- NFHS Rule Change. While wrestlers cannot wear wristbands, sweatbands, bicep bands or arm sleeves that do not contain a pad, they now will be able to wear leg sleeves that do not contain a pad. Since wrestlers are allowed to wear tights on both legs, the committee agreed that wearing leg sleeves would be no different.

All MOA Information may be found on the MHSА website at www.mhsa.org, including forms, MCA information, regular and postseason fees, officials insurance, NFHS Network, and more.