



THE OFFICIAL WORD

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A Publication of the Montana Officials' Association

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MOA Commissioner Update

I hope everyone is gearing up for an enjoyable holiday season. Winter sports and activities are off to a strong start, and it's great to see gyms filled with fans supporting our outstanding student-athletes across the state,

We are pleased to share that the MHSAs has officially moved into our new building in Helena, located at 631 N. Last Chance Gulch. This new space enhances our ability to serve member schools and better support all MHSAs programs and activities. We also encourage you to schedule meetings in our new space or simply stop by whenever you are in the area—our doors are always open, and we look forward to welcoming you.

As we begin another winter season, we are entering our third year of utilizing MHSAs-assigned, sport-specific rule interpreters. We appreciate their expertise and commitment to supporting our schools and officials. Below are our key personnel for this year's winter activities:

- Basketball - Greta Buehler, MHSAs Basketball Liaison and Rob Tesch, MHSAs/MOAs Basketball Rules Interpreter
- Swimming - Kip Ryan, MHSAs Swimming Liaison and Merle Gunderson, MHSAs Swimming Rules Interpreter
- Wrestling - Scott Wilson, MHSAs Wrestling Liaison and Joe Sol, MHSAs/MOAs Wrestling Rules Interpreter

Our staff and rule interpreters work extremely hard each season. Each sport presents its own challenging rules, and our team is committed to providing clear, consistent communication to coaches, administrators, and officials throughout the year. The MHSAs/MOAs is here to support you—please don't hesitate to reach out anytime for information or assistance.

We are excited to introduce the new MHSAs website, featuring a fresh, modern look designed to better serve our schools, communities, and fans. The updated platform is fully mobile-friendly, making it easier than ever to access information on the go. Because schedules are entered into Arbiter, all basketball schedules and scores are now readily available in one convenient location, allowing fans to stay connected throughout the season. We hope you enjoy the improved experience and the enhanced accessibility the new site provides.

Happy Holidays and looking forward to a great 2026
Brian Michelotti – MOA Commissioner

Why I Officiate – Officials Spotlight

Doug McAlear – Region 2



I was asked to write a little about how and why I began officiating. Part of me thinks this was also a memory test to see if an old guy like me could remember that far back. In truth, more than three decades as a high school official have brought countless rewards and great experiences.

In 1990, I was living and working in Polson. Winters there are a big change from summertime on the lake, especially when you're in your mid-twenties looking for something to do outside of work. As a longtime sports participant and fan, I jumped at the chance to ride along with a high school basketball official to a Friday night game. That trip got me thinking that officiating might be a good use of my time.

Being more of a "football guy," I found that Polson had a small pool of officials—many of them former teachers, friends, or acquaintances. I still remember driving to Kalispell for my first MHSAs Rules Clinic with Bill Sprinkle and Jim Haugen, back in the days before online clinics, and making a trip to Missoula to buy my first uniform—black stirrup socks included.

My first assignment sent me to Hot Springs to work an 8-man football game with a three-man crew. At that point, I had never even watched an 8-man game, let alone officiated one. Somehow, I survived—not only that game, but the ones that followed, including my first varsity contest. There were rules to study, mechanics to learn, and new fields to travel to, but this new “hobby” had me hooked.

After two years, I relocated to Missoula for work and joined the local officials’ pool. It was a much bigger pond, with far more schools and officials, but it meant more games and more “snaps,” which I believe is the best way to get better. Like in Polson, I learned from many veteran officials, and those lessons turned into friendships that remain to this day.

Although I’m now back living and working in Polson, I still officiate football out of the Missoula pool. During my 20 or so years there, I also added basketball and softball to my résumé. Officiating has been a way for me to give back to schools and communities across western Montana—but it’s also been more than that.

Now considered a “grizzled old vet” in referee years, I can see the light at the end of my officiating tunnel. It feels like just yesterday I was the young guy buying his first gear and trying to drink from a firehose of rules and mechanics. All in all, it’s been a great run—far more rewarding than I ever imagined when I started.

The money was never the main motivation. While it’s nice to be compensated, early varsity games paid \$30 or \$40. The real reward has always been the relationships. You work with guys for a few months, then pick right back up the next season as if no time has passed. Along the way there have been weddings, kids, holiday parties, and even funerals – but the constant has been the people you share the fields with.

Even with new challenges compared to 3½ decades ago, I still believe officiating high school sports is a great thing to do. I often tell young people it’s a way to stay involved, earn some extra money, and build friendships and connections that last a lifetime.

MOA Regional Directors – December Meeting

On December 8-9, 2025, the MOA Regional Directors conducted its regularly scheduled meeting in Helena.

The following is a synopsis of the major items. These changes will be effective for 2026-2027 (unless noted):

[December 8-9, 2025 - Board Action](#)

Basketball Information

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

[Basketball Rules and Regulations](#)

Other basketball-related information can be found on the basketball page of the MHSA website.

Wrestling Information

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

[Wrestling Rules and Regulations](#)

Other wrestling-related information can be found on the wrestling page of the MHSA website.

Winter Postseason Dates:

Basketball

Districts – February 16-21, 2026
Divisional – February 23-28, 2026
State – March 11-14, 2026

Wrestling

Divisional - February 13-14, 2026
February 19-21, 2026

Please see the MHSA website at www.mhsa.org for specific classification dates.

MHSA Website

 The launch of our newly redesigned website — www.mhsa.org! With a fresh look, improved navigation, and updated resources, our new site makes it easier than ever to stay connected and informed on all MHSA and MOA Information.

MOA Logo

The new MOA logo has been launched, and it will begin to be used in all MOA publications and start be incorporated into the MOA uniforms beginning in 2026-2027.

Arbiter

The Montana High School Association has transitioned to Arbiter Sports. Helpful information for navigating your Arbiter dashboard may be found in the [Arbiter Training Room](#). This is a site for training videos, past webinar recordings, and other information to help you manage your account.

For all Arbiter support, please reach out to mhsa@arbitersports.com

MHSA/MOA – Holiday Closure Dates

The MHSA office will be closed from December 22nd, 2025 - January 3rd, 2026.