

SOCCER

CHAMPIONSHIP DATES

Class A (First Round Playoffs).....	October 12-17
Class AA (First Round Playoffs)	October 20
Class AA (Quarterfinals).....	October 24
Class A (Semi-Finals).....	October 23-24
Class AA (Semi-Finals)	October 27
Class A (Championship Games).....	October 30-31
Class AA (Championship Games)	October 31

I - GENERAL RULES AND REGULATIONS

- (1) The Montana High School Association will promote, provide for and control all interscholastic soccer activities among the member schools for both boys and girls.
- (2) Schools will be divided into two classes for boys' and girls' soccer: Class AA and Class A.
- (3) The playing rules as authorized and published by the National Federation of State High School Associations for the current year shall be followed for all games. No overtime games will be played during the regular season.
- (4) The Montana High School Association Executive Board shall establish the starting date for practice and the first allowable date when any contests may be played. No individual shall play in any Association contest until he/she has a minimum of eight (8) days of soccer practice of at least one practice session per day on eight (8) different days (no practice permitted on Sunday), prior to the date of the first allowable game.

The initial eight (8) practices for each individual must be completed as a comprehensive, regularly scheduled team practice with the full coaching staff.

When determining what constitutes a MHSA practice that satisfies the language above in (4), the following criteria must be applied:

1. Practice must be at least one (1) hour long.
2. At least one full squad (varsity team/J.V. team/C squad) and their coaching staff must be present.
3. The athlete must participate in the entire practice.
4. Practice should include the majority of drills and conditioning that are the norm for that team or squad.
5. A practice the day of a game does not count (unless an athlete is practicing with another squad that does not have a game that day, i.e. a varsity team member who stays home and practices with the JV team that does not have a game that day).
6. Warm-ups or walk-throughs with the team prior to a game does not constitute a practice.

If a student begins his/her initial eight (8) days of required practices and that period of days is interrupted by sickness, injury, academic ineligibility or any other reason for a period of two weeks, then the student shall be required to practice an additional four (4) days and in cases of sickness or injury to produce a doctor's release.

Athletes participating on teams competing in MHSA post season play, which overlaps the beginning of the next MHSA sanctioned activity starting practice date, may be credited for practices during the overlap period toward meeting the minimum practice requirement of the overlapped activity season.

If a student transfers to a new school after completing the required days of preseason practices for their sport or activity, the student must complete an additional number of practices (equal to half the # of required practices for that sport or activity) at their new school.

- (5) In Classes AA and A, fourteen (14) soccer games will be the maximum limit for schools including invitational tournaments but are exclusive of Association-sponsored tournaments.

These game limits apply to each squad - varsity, junior varsity, B squad, freshman etc. No team may play more than two games in one day during the regular season.

INTERPRETATIONS

1. Any soccer team that receives a forfeiture may be allowed to schedule and play a make-up game(s), but the team that gives the forfeit must count forfeited game(s) as one of the season's game limit for its school and that team will not be allowed to schedule another game in place of the forfeited game(s).
2. Definition of "squad" - An athletic squad is determined by union of "act and intent" by grouping together a number of students to play as a unit to represent the school, under the direction of a designated coach or coaches; i.e. a participant who plays in a preliminary contest cannot start in the varsity or next game in the same day/evening.
3. Club team participation - During the MHSA soccer season, no more than five (5) rostered participants in a school's program can compete in an outside soccer event on the same team.

- (6) Participation Limits: If a team is scheduled for a single varsity contest in addition to sub-varsity contest(s) on any given date, each player will be limited to participation in three separate halves of the scheduled games. Regardless of the order in which the games are scheduled, a player who participates in a sub-varsity contest cannot start the varsity (or next) game. A player who starts the varsity game is not eligible for participation in a sub-varsity contest scheduled on the same day.

If a team is scheduled for two varsity contests on any given date with no scheduled sub-varsity competition, each varsity-eligible player will be allowed participation in four separate halves of the scheduled varsity games.

- (7) In accordance with NFHS rules, the home team will wear dark jerseys/socks, and the visiting team will wear solid white jerseys/socks. In the event that either team cannot wear the designated jersey, they must notify the other team at least 24 hours prior to the contest.
- (8) The soccer season for both boys and girls officially closes with the end of the last regular scheduled game or the state championship game for the classification of the school concerned.
- (9) Schools must participate in the soccer schedule and play the majority of their scheduled games to be eligible to participate in the MHSA tournaments.
- (10) Host schools are required to provide the scorer(s) for regular season games.
- (11) No all-state teams or players shall be picked or announced at the tournament/play-off sites by either the Executive Board or tournament officials. This applies to playoffs and state championships.
- (12) No school is required to take part in any contests or athletic events, but once entered, teams are obligated to participate in a contest or athletic event to its normal conclusion unless the contest is terminated by mutual consent of the school officials involved due to unusual weather or game conditions, or situations which could be hazardous to participants or spectators. Any coach is prohibited from unilaterally refusing to play.

If a school fails to complete contests or athletic events that they have entered, the violating school would be subject to penalties as deemed appropriate and necessary by the Executive Director.

No school is required to take part in any game or tournament, but once entered under the plan outlined, schools shall carry out their part of the program in fairness to all other school represented. Any team taking part in season play is automatically entered into the first tournament/playoff round held in that division. That team shall not be allowed to withdraw from playing in such tournament/playoff round without the specific approval of the Executive Director. The penalty for violation shall be as outlined under Penalties, Article VIII, Section (2).

- (13) In the event that any team should refuse to take part as provided above, then such team shall forfeit its right to respective tournament championship, and the next team in line shall replace the defaulting team in the final playoff. Furthermore, the defaulting team shall be barred from all tournament participation the following year, unless excused by the Executive Board for such default.
- (14) It is recommended that officials shall not be seen in the company of coaches, socially or otherwise, at any time during the course of the post season.
- (15) By state association adoption, if a game is suspended because of conditions which make it impossible to continue play, and less than one-half of the game has been played, the game will be rescheduled from the start.
- (16) By state association adoption, the official time is kept by the head referee. The use of stadium clocks is encouraged. When stadium clocks are used, it is recommended that the time run to the two-minute mark; then the clock be turned off.
- (17) By state association adoption, the diagonal officiating system is used. However, a dual officiating mechanic may be used for sub varsity games in emergency situations only.
- (18) For MHSAA postseason play teams shall use the Baden ST350 soccer ball when provided. MHSAA recommends the use of the Baden ST350 soccer ball for playoffs where no ball is provided. For regular season and post season play the ball used for all levels of play shall include the NFHS authenticating mark.
- (19) The MHSAA 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.

II - ELIGIBILITY OF PLAYERS

- (1) Teams and players recognized as eligible to participate in interscholastic soccer in Montana under the rules of the Montana High School Association will be eligible to participate in the tournaments arranged. All schools of the state are cautioned to carefully check over their lists of potential players and make certain that each student whose name is submitted is fully qualified under the rules.
- (2) A disqualified player or coach (one who receives a red card) will not participate for the remainder of the event and will be suspended for the next regularly scheduled or rescheduled event at that level of competition and all other games in the interim at any level of competition. A second disqualification could result in a four competition suspension. (Refer to By-Laws, Article VIII, Section (2), 2.6.)
- (3) All players and coaches must comply with the soccer behavior improvement plan as established by the MHSAA Executive Board. In 2023, the soccer behavior plan was modified to focus on major infractions. Players and/or coaches who are in violation of the expected standards are subject to game suspensions as well as other penalties as defined in the plan or as determined by the Executive Director.

III - TOURNAMENT PARTICIPANTS

No more than twenty-two (22) players in Classes AA and A can be in uniform for any tournament/playoff game.

IV - NUMBER OF GAMES DURING ANY TOURNAMENT DAY

No team shall be permitted to play more than two games in any one day or any playoff or tournament.

V - TOURNAMENT POLICING

- (1) The local tournament manager and/or committee must make arrangements for adequate policing at the field during the course of the tournament, which includes general policing of the building and grounds as well as policing of team dressing room facilities.
- (2) These rules apply for divisional and state tournaments.
- (3) Special attention must be given to insure that the game officials are afforded proper protection when leaving the field, during their movement to the dressing area and while in the dressing room.

VI - CROWD CONTROL AT SEASON ATHLETIC CONTESTS

The Executive Board of the MHSAA urges all school administrators, athletic administrators and coaches to establish a policy in their school to prohibit students from rushing on the field at the conclusion of the athletic contests. The request for this policy comes as a result of the dangers to players, officials and fans with the rushing of uncontrolled fans onto the confined area of the field.

VII - DETERMINATION OF TOURNAMENT SITES

- (1) The determination of sites, tournament managers and arrangements for all MHSAA state tournaments will be made by the Executive Board. This determination will be made at a meeting of the Board after interested member schools or communities have been given an opportunity to submit written invitations to host an Association tournament. Tournament managers cannot be a coach or an official if that coach or official is participating in the tournament.
- (2) Following are some of the criteria which will be considered by the Board in making the determination of tournament sites: (a) adequate field facilities; (b) adequate community facilities for team and spectator housing and eating; (c) definite invitation showing local community support; (d) geographical rotation when feasible.
- (3) If the Board locates a tournament at a member school's facility, an administrator of that school will usually be named tournament manager. If the state tournament is located in a facility other than a member school, the Executive Director, a member of the MHSAA staff, or a member of the Executive Board will be named as manager.

VIII - TOURNAMENT PROGRAMS, CONCESSIONS AND CORPORATE SPONSORS

- (1) The tournament program rights for all district and divisional programs will be determined by the respective district or division. The tournament program rights for all state tournaments/championships will be the responsibility of the MHSAA Executive Director.
- (2) The concession rights for any state tournament must be approved by the Executive Director. Concession rights include but are not limited to t-shirts, other apparel, photos, buttons etc.
- (3) At district and divisional events, concessions where goods and/or services are received would be at the approval of managers of events.
- (4) Corporate sponsorship of any postseason event is the responsibility of the MHSAA Executive Board and requires

Board approval. Exceptions are: a) program advertisements and b) signage or announcements acknowledging the receipt of donated goods including food or beverages for the hospitality room, the use of tents at outdoor events, or the use of other equipment necessary for staging the event. Signage should be placed only in the appropriate areas; i.e. on the tents or in the hospitality room/area.

Established facility sponsorships are not affected provided that MHSA corporate sponsorship requirements are met.

IX - TOURNAMENT FINANCE PLAN

- (1) Immediately after the conclusion of each state tournament/playoff the tournament manager will remit to the Executive Director of the Montana High School Association a complete financial report of the tournament.
- (2) The Executive Board wishes to point out that the local community definitely profits from the tournaments in three ways: (a) concessions of the tournaments are normally given to local organizations; (b) local communities profit considerably through income at hotels, motels, restaurants and stores; (c) the local school is under no expense to send its team to the tournament.
- (3) The host school does not underwrite the expense of the tournament, but is obligated to do its best to see to it that the gross receipts are such that allowable expenses are paid in full.

Allowable Tournament Expenses

Charges against the tournament will stand for payment in the following order:

- (1) Referees' fees and expenses.
- (2) Normal administrative expenses. (Printing tickets, scorebook, advertising, signs, postage, telephone, clerical, scorers and timers.)
- (3) Use of facility charges (rental), shall include all charges, if any, for the following: extra field preparation/maintenance, utilities, ticket sales, ticket takers, police/security, entrance guards, ushers, parking attendants, first aid room and towel service.
- (4) Team expenses are to be computed as follows:
 - a. In addition to the certified players on the tournament/playoff roster (a maximum of eighteen) per diem will be allowed for four additional persons at \$45.00 per day for a maximum of 24 persons (22 players, 2 coaches) plus travel expense allowance of \$2.50 per mile for one round trip for each school participating.
 - b. The decision to stay at the tournament/playoff site or to commute rests with each school. If a school elects to commute to the tournament/playoff site, any or all days the tournament/playoff is in session, they will be paid expenses as follows:
 1. Mileage — \$2.50 per mile, for one round trip. (In computing the number of miles traveled, the shortest paved route open to travel, as listed on the current Official Montana Highway Map published by the Montana Department of Highways will be the mileage used.)
 2. Per diem — One day per diem allowed @ \$45.00 for the persons specified when team stays overnight or one day per diem allowed @ \$20.00 for the persons specified when they do not stay overnight. One additional day per diem will be allowed if travel distance is more than 200 miles one way, if the team stays overnight an extra night preceding the tournament dates.
 3. No expenses are paid for the day following the tournament.

c. Teams located at the tournament/playoff site will not receive any mileage or per diem.

Note: No guarantee is made that teams will receive maximum expense allowance.

- (5) The soccer balls for all state tournaments/championship games will be furnished by the MHSA office at no charge.

Non-allowable Tournament Expenses

- (1) Proper policing of hotels.
- (2) Proper timing and scoring equipment.
- (3) Adequate dressing room and shower facilities.

Playoff Finances for Class AA and A

Travel expenses will be calculated using the team expense formula as printed under Allowable Tournament Expenses Item (4). Profits for any postseason Class AA and A soccer contest will be divided between teams on a "site-to-site" basis in the event that profits do not cover travel expenses of visiting teams. Profits, minus reasonable itemized facilities and administrative expenses, will be distributed to traveling schools.

In the event that a single school hosts playoff games for both girls and boys and two differing schools are traveling to the game site, any profits after expenses will be divided proportionately between the two traveling schools based on miles traveled to the game site. For example:

Host site is School A. Profit after host school expenses are met equals \$1,000.00.

	Visitors' Mileage	Mileage %	Profit %
School B:	Girls = 200 miles	33% of mileage	\$333.00 (33%/profit)
School C:	Boys = 400 miles	66% of mileage	\$677.00 (66%/profit)
	Total = 600 miles		

In the event that profits are great enough that all travel expenses are covered during a playoff contest(s), any remaining profits will be forwarded to the MHSA to be equally divided among Class AA or A schools that sponsor soccer and had teams qualify for post season play.

Established Ticket Prices for State Tournaments/Playoffs

The following ticket prices as established by the MHSA Executive Board will be used for all boys' and girls' state tournaments:

	Adult	Student
General Admission:	\$ 10.00	\$ 8.00

X - SELECTION OF OFFICIALS FOR STATE TOURNAMENT

Refer to the MOA section for procedure for selection of officials to work soccer tournaments/playoffs.

XI - CLASS AA SOCCER PROGRAM - BOYS AND GIRLS

- (1) See www.mhsa.org for the detailed alignments for Class AA.
- (2) Class AA goal differential language:

When a team is winning by:

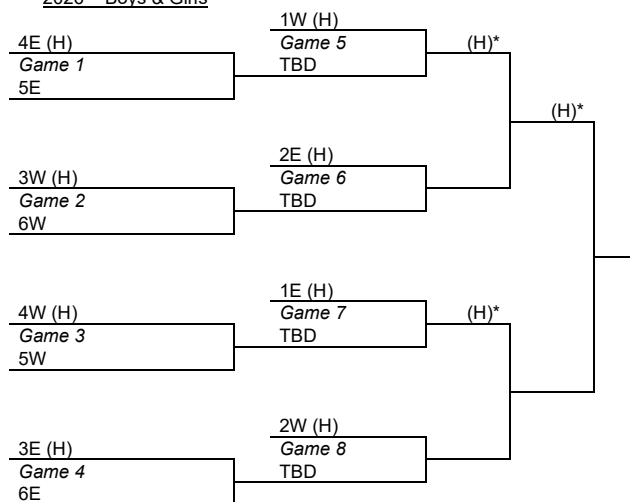
8 goals, they will reduce their number of players playing from 11 to 10.
 9 goals, they will reduce their number of players playing from 10 to 9.
 10 goals, the contest ends.

If at any time the goal deficit decreases, then the winning team may put a player back into the game.

- (3) The Class AA schools will be charged with the responsibility of playoff structure and seeding.

- (4) Playoff structure is for both boys and girls and will be held each year. Each division will have charge of the operation and management of its respective playoffs as to times and sites, and with other arrangements in accordance with the standard tournament plan as set for all tournaments and outlined in this handbook.
- (5) Standings for AA playoffs will be determined by AA conference policy.
- (6) The dates for playoff games will be determined by the AA Conference.
- (7) Only conference games will be used to determine conference standings. Three (3) points will be assigned to a win, one (1) point to a tie, and zero (0) points for a loss.
- (8) Tie breaking procedures will be determined by the Class AA Conference.
- (9) Each division's seeding will be as follows for to the state playoffs:

2026 – Boys & Girls



Semi-Final and State Championship

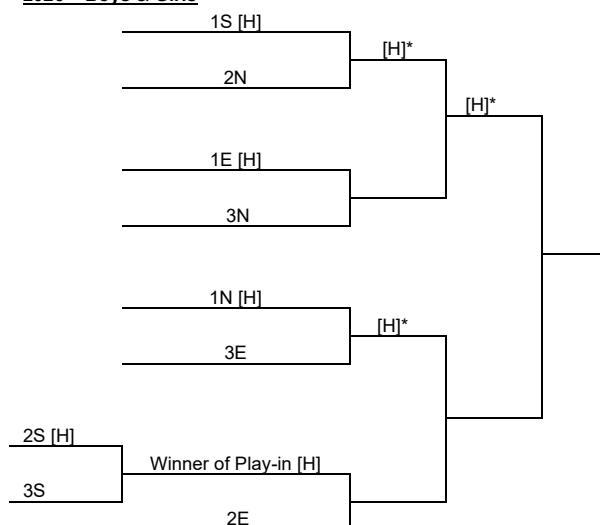
*Hosted by the higher seed.

- (9) By state association adoption, a winner shall be determined in all playoff/tournament games with overtime play as follows:
 - a. There shall be two full ten-minute overtime periods (not sudden victory). A coin toss shall be held, and the winner shall choose a goal to defend or to kick off first. The loser of the toss shall be given the remaining choice. At the end of the first ten-minute period the teams shall change ends.
 - b. If the score remains tied after both ten-minute overtime periods, proceed to kicks from the mark. Kicks from the mark should be administered as outlined on pages 102-103 of the National Federation Soccer Rules Book.
- (10) The dates and sites for post season play will be determined by the MHSA Executive Board.

XII – CLASS A SOCCER PROGRAM – BOYS AND GIRLS

- (1) See www.mhsa.org for the detailed alignments for Class A.
- (2) Class A goal differential language:
When a team is winning by 10 goals, the contest ends.
- (3) Each team will play each conference opponent twice. All three conferences will combine to fill in the remaining games or pick up AA opponents as scheduling allows.
- (4) The championship series will consist of nine (9) teams, three (3) teams from the Southern division, Northern division, and Eastern division, using the following bracket:

2026 – Boys & Girls



Note for H*: the higher seed will host each playoff game. If like seeds play each other, the bracket determines the host site. If the two teams in the playoff/championship are from the same division, the team that finished higher in the conference standings will host the game.

For the play-in game [H], if the two (2) seed has beaten the three (3) seed twice during regular season conference play, then there is no game.

- (5) Conference Scoring and Tie Breaker:

Each conference contest will be scored as follows: win = 3 points, tie = 1 point, and loss = no points.

In the event that two conference opponents are tied in the conference standings, the following criteria will be used to satisfy the tie and establish seeding:

- a. Head-to-head competition between tied opponents based upon win/loss ratio.
- b. Goal differential between tied opponents in both conference contests using both goals scored, and goals scored against with a maximum goal differential of 5 goals.
- c. Head-to-head competition with the next highest common conference opponent based upon win/loss ratio. If the next highest common conference opponent is also tied with another team(s) use the opponent that has the better conference record as the "next highest". If the next highest common conference opponent is still tied with another team(s), use the opponent that has the better overall record as the next highest.
- d. Goal differential between tied opponents and the next highest common conference opponent using both goals scored, and goals scored against. If the next highest common conference opponent is also tied with another team(s) use the opponent that has the better conference record as the "next highest". If the next highest common conference opponent is still tied with another team(s), use the opponent that has the better overall record as the next highest.
- e. Coin toss by class 'A' soccer chair or his/her designee with the winner taking the higher seed.

- (6) By state association adoption, a winner shall be determined in all playoff/tournament games with overtime play as follows:

- a. There shall be two full ten-minute overtime periods (not sudden victory). A coin toss shall be held, and the winner shall choose a goal to defend or to kick off first. The loser of the toss shall be given the remaining choice. At the end of the first ten-minute period the teams shall change ends.

- b. If the score remains tied after both ten-minute overtime periods, proceed to kicks from the mark. Kicks from the mark should be administered as outlined **on pages 89-90** in the National Federation Soccer Rules Book.

XIII - POLICY FOR TOURNAMENT PASSES

The Association has established the following policy for tournament passes which shall be adhered to by all tournament managers.

- (1) For school administrators - fourteen all-session tickets when one team qualifies per school. When two teams qualify, an additional six (6) passes shall be given for a total of twenty (20). If schools co-op the host school will receive the fourteen or twenty administrative tickets and the other school(s) in the co-op will each receive an additional four (4) administrative tickets. These complimentary tickets are to be distributed by the superintendent to the principal, coaches, band directors, school board chairpersons, bus drivers, cheerleading coaches, sponsors of half-time entertainment etc., and maybe spouses of some.
- (2) For players – twenty-two (22) passes for players. No manager passes are provided.
- (3) For spirit, bands and performing groups — they will be allowed free admission at playoff and state championship games when they play or perform.
- (4) For radio – three passes to each station given permission to broadcast the tournament or games. The game (or games) must be broadcast in its (or their) entirety.
- (5) For media other than radio
 - a. Print news media - one pass for Associated Press and passes for working staff of local newspapers of teams in the tournament or newspapers in the marketing area of those teams. Members of the print media are required to show their Montana Newspaper Association press credentials when picking up their passes.
 - b. Television news media - passes for working staff of local stations of teams in the tournament or stations in the marketing area of those teams.
 - c. Commercial photography or broadcast - passes for working staff as contracted by the event manager or MHSA.
 - d. Passes will not be issued for spouses or children who attend the event with working members of the media.