

ORGANIZED 1946



TELEPHONE: (410) 767-0376
FAX: (410) 333-3111

MEMBER OF THE
NATIONAL FEDERATION OF
STATE HIGH SCHOOL
ASSOCIATIONS

R. ANDREW WARNER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

To: Directors, Coordinators, and Supervisors of Athletics

Date: September 23, 2022

Subject: Conduct at Interscholastic Athletic Competitions

The Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA) supports our local educational agencies (LEA) and member schools in their enforcement of MPSSAA, LEA, and National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) playing rules related to the conduct of spectators, coaches, and student-athletes at interscholastic athletic contests. The MPSSAA wishes to express its sincere gratitude to educational leaders for their countless hours of work to provide safe and positive school-based athletic experiences.

In the first three weeks of the MPSSAA interscholastic sports season, the vast majority of positive experiences have been overshadowed by a few incidences of egregious behavior that have led to disqualifications for fighting; disqualifications for use of profanity, insulting, or vulgar language and gestures; and disruptions to the orderly flow of a contest by spectators. The MPSSAA, in conjunction with the 24 LEAs and their 198 member schools, must confront these few, yet extremely disruptive altercations with a unified and vigorous response to prevent such behavior from becoming normalized behavior at athletic events.

In order to preserve and protect the competitive opportunities for over 110,000 annual participants, urgent and intentional action must be taken by all member schools and LEAs to emphasize expectations, accountability, and consequences for disruptive behavior. The significance of interscholastic athletics on the social, emotional, and physical well-being of students cannot be allowed to be undone by the unacceptable, inexcusable, and intolerable behavior of a few. With this in mind, the MPSSAA is requesting LEAs and member schools do the following:

- LEAs to consider expanding any disqualification for participant fighting to a minimum of two contests for those physically involved in the disruption and for spectator students to be held accountable as if the incident happened during the school day;
- Member school principals and athletic directors to redefine and communicate robust ramifications for any coach and player disqualification;

- Head coaches to put teachable moments and life lessons at the forefront of decision making when determining playing time for those who refuse to meet the high-quality standards associated with representing one's school, one's team, and oneself;
- Head coaches to set the tone by demanding participants and fellow coaches refrain from any derogatory response, dissent, or negative emotional outburst towards officials or opposing teams. Head coaches should hold coaching staffs accountable for their actions;
- Member schools to review and use resources through the [MPSSAA Respect the Game](#) and the [NFHS Learn Sportsmanship](#) and [Fundamentals of Coaching](#) platforms as necessary;
- Coaching staff to be prepared to address student sections, parents, and other spectators whose responses and actions do not reflect the values of your school system;
- Principals, athletic directors, and administrators to hold coaches, students, and team supporters accountable with an understanding these programs are not a right, but rather a privilege of the educational program; and,
- LEAs, principals, and athletic directors, with the full support of the MPSSAA, to address repeated disruptive actions with penalties consistent with "*Misconduct Detrimental to a Tournament*", including but not limited to:
 - member school loss of hosting any home playoff contests,
 - loss of eligibility to participate in the state tournament,
 - declare the school on probation for one school year which shall render the school ineligible to compete in any approved State meet or tournament, or
 - additional penalties as may seem justified.

Urgent and intentional intervention by all member schools must occur to prevent disruptive incidents from grabbing publicity headlines, overshadowing game recaps, and good news stories on the community support of these valued programs. Together, we must continue to deter disruptive players, coaches, and spectators from non-sportsmanlike behaviors before school systems and venues look to curb security and liability issues by returning to spectator capacity limits while reducing community and student support for interscholastic athletics. Without taking proactive approaches there will be devastating consequences on the participation opportunities that create one of the greatest learning tools available to our young people through teachable moments, life lessons, character building, and positive community support of the local high school.

The MPSSAA fully supports all measures each LEA can intentionally take immediately to support educational-based interscholastic athletic contests and will continue to monitor, provide guidance, and intervene as necessary regarding any incidents that disrupt the harmonious administration of these quintessential programs to our member schools.