



Flinthills School District USD #492

806 Southeast Rosalia Road
Rosalia, Kansas 67132-9176
Phone: (620) 476-2237/Fax: (620) 476-2253



Jeremy Boldra, Superintendent

Rule Changes Requested to KSHSAA

I would like to see one or more of the following rules changed (Most of the focus is on Middle School Sports, but some extends to the High School):

Rule 16: Semester Requirements

Rule 17: Age Requirements

Rule 18: Transfer

Rule 22: Outside Competition

Rule 26: Anti-tryout and Private Instruction

Rule 29: Cooperative Agreement

Rule 30: Seasons of Activities

I believe that middle school students need to be given the opportunity to play club sports during their season, and/or 7th and 8th graders should have the opportunity to play high school sports should they be good enough.

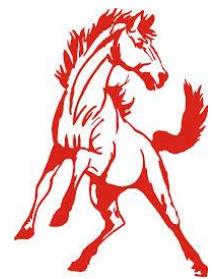
Middle school is a time for exploration of interests and development. Middle schools across the state run their season schedules with much differential, especially the winter sports. Some split girls' and boys' seasons, some follow the high school seasons, and some run intramural programs instead. Regardless, there are no state championships for which middle school programs in Kansas are competing. If this is the case, what difference does it make if we allow middle school students to compete on both their school teams and club teams? By not allowing them to compete in both, we not only limit their ability to explore and develop interests, but we create a difference in equity. For example, if a student's middle school basketball season is completed in the fall, they can compete in club sports in January or earlier, usually competing at a higher level, but certainly giving them more game opportunities for development as compared to a student whose middle school basketball season mimics the high school basketball season. I would also contend that sometimes middle school coaches are not as strong as you might find in the club circuit.

Middle school basketball teams are limited to 16 games and may stretch over a typical high school season or they may only stretch over a couple of months, but with club sports there is no limit. They can play MAYB or AAU basketball almost every weekend and easily hit 16 games in a month. It is not fair to tell a middle school child or parent, especially in rural areas, to choose between their club team or their



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school team as the political pressure to play for the school is monumental, and I would contend it is also important. So how do athletes who are exceptional get higher level competition through the season and still benefit their schools?

Additionally, I know lots of girls who are playing club volleyball during their middle school basketball season as well as boys who are playing club baseball during basketball and track seasons. Why isn't a student allowed to play the same sport within the season, but allowed to play other sports during the season? Surely we can develop language that indicates a student must prioritize the school team before a club team, but at the same time allow the student-athlete an option to go play the same sport in his/her free time just as they are allowed to play other sports during that time. If we don't want to allow kids to play the same sport during the season with another club, the KSHSAA needs to set the duration of the season for the middle school sports for equality. Especially with basketball, some leagues play the boys' season in the fall and the girls' season in the spring. Some follow the high school season. With this difference, some can play significantly more club basketball giving them a decided advantage over other basketball players in the state. Just like school funding, a zip code (residential location) should not create inequities between students and their opportunities, whether they are academic, athletic, or another.

The Kansans Can Vision, according to KSDE, is to lead the world in the success of each student. Academically, we work hard toward that goal, but why do we not have the same vision with athletics? For example, 8th graders can take Algebra I and other high school courses (I'm sure somewhere 7th graders are taking high school courses now) and high school students can take college classes. If we allow the academically gifted students to grow and advance, why are we still holding the athletically gifted students back (especially in small schools where competition might be lacking)? Shouldn't the KSHSAA and KSDE goals align in the growth and advancement of students?

Occasionally, we see younger athletes (often in middle school) who are either at a higher skill level or have a significant size advantage that correlates with high school sports much more than middle school sports. If a student-athlete is athletically gifted, but is not really challenged in his/her league why not give them the opportunity to play at a higher level if the local district will allow it? This disparity is more obvious in small schools where there are fewer players. A couple of recent examples that come to mind are Willie Cauley-Stein who played at Spearville and Isaiah Loudermilk who played at West Elk. Both of these athletes were capable of playing at the high school level in middle school with their size. I do not contend that they should have played varsity football, but probably could have played JV. They were definitely capable of playing basketball at the high school level during their middle school years, and maybe at the Varsity level. Willie Cauley-Stein was recruited to Olathe Northwest to play out his high school years before being recruited to Kentucky Basketball for one year before he entered the NBA draft. Isaiah Loudermilk remained at West Elk but was recruited to Wisconsin to play football and red-shirted his freshman year. It is obvious to me that they both could compete at a high level and it would have been more advantageous for them as well as others to start competing at that level earlier. Willie



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moved to Olathe to get higher level competition, whereas Isaiah did not have that option. Had Isaiah moved to an area with a more competitive league, he may have started his college freshman year rather than red-shirting. My point is that some kids need more competition at a higher level than what the middle school can offer. How are we as a state doing justice to a child who can compete at a higher level when forced to compete at a level that does neither he/she nor anyone else in the league any good? Why are we telling Kansas kids to take a back seat to kids from other states in terms of opportunities to play at the college level? Why do we as members of the KSHSAA continue to restrict Kansas kids from reaching their dreams? their success?

At a time when we are witnessing the explosion of youth sports and competition is growing at a rapid rate across the country, the Kansas Board of Regents has now removed the rule where Kansas community colleges have to roster half of their spots with Kansas kids. We as members of the KSHSAA continue to have some of the strictest limitations for athletic competition in the country. Do we want Kansas kids to grow and have opportunities that kids in other states do? Do we want Kansas kids to have opportunities to get athletic scholarships at the same rate/percentage that kids in other states do? If so, then why do we continue to not only keep Kansas kids from those opportunities, but we're taking more opportunities away? When do we as KSHSAA members start adopting a growth mindset and stop using the old adage that "that's the way we've always done it"? It's time to change and give Kansas kids equal athletic opportunities. In the November 2018 Issue of the KSHSAA Journal, there is a republished article by Nick Schwein entitled "It's More Than Just Sports". In the last three paragraphs, it reads "Giving kids every chance to succeed in life should be priority No. 1 – whether it be on the field or in the classroom. Sometimes that field is the classroom. There is more to life than sports, but don't discount how important lessons learned in sports are. If you ask me, there should be more teams available for kids to play on in elementary through high school. And if they are given that opportunity at a young age, when they grow up, they'll realize it's more than just sports." Given the fact that the KSHSAA has reprinted this article more than once, I assume that we believe in the message. But why don't practice what we believe?

There are three states that allow 7th & 8th graders to play high school sports with restrictions: Nebraska, Minnesota, and Louisiana. There are six states that allow 7th & 8th graders to play high school sports with no restrictions: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Kentucky, Mississippi, and North Dakota. Finally, there are a handful that allow 8th grade participation at the high school only. So, there are at least three states in the Midwest that have similar population structures and allow 7th & 8th grade participation at the high school level. Why aren't we considering this to give our students an equal advantage? Real change is needed to avoid putting our kids at a disadvantage when competing for the same college roster spots.

Below, in italics, is a modified excerpt out of the Minnesota High School Activities Association handbook that could easily be added to the KSHSAA handbook.



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Participation in League-sponsored programs is limited to students in grades 7 through 12. Students in grade 7, 8, and 9 may participate only if they are enrolled in a continuation school for that high school. 6th graders are not eligible to participate at the high school level.

Definitions:

- 1. A Continuation School is one that is under the same administrative head and governing board.*
- 2. A student in grades 7, 8, or 9, who attends a school under a separate administrative head and governing board; which does not have a continuation high school and where no other opportunity for participation on a high school team exists; is eligible to participate for a high school team provided the high school and the non-continuation school have established a joint agreement for participation in each League activity. The participation agreement for each activity or athletic program can be formed with:*

A. The public school in the public high school attendance area as determined by the district school board where the noncontinuation school is geographically located. If the public high school in #1 above declines the request for participation agreement the non-continuation school may form a participation agreement with any other public high school; or

B. Any non-public high school.

Should the rules be different for contact sports? Yes, I think their needs to be more limitations for contact sports. Do we want kids to be multiple sport athletes? Yes, so don't limit them during their season by saying, "You'll have to focus on that sport in the off-season." The "off-season" is another sport season. By saying that, we force kids into selecting one sport to focus on. Should we be considering some high school sports as well, regardless of whether there is a State Championship? I think we should, but we have to start somewhere. Let's start having conversations about doing what's best for kids and their success. Let's start working on rule changes that make sense and stop patronizing Kansas kids.

I also want to explore the transfer rule as it relates to middle school sports. Middle school is a time of exploration, getting to know oneself, and learning. Let's allow those entering eighth grade the opportunity to enter with immediate eligibility. A seventh grade student may realize their middle school is not a good fit, and choose to go to a different middle school for their eighth grade year. There are no state championships in middle school sports, so let's allow middle school students to participate in the sports they want to without exception.

Respectfully,

Jeremy Boldra



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Questions to Consider:

- 1) Should the KSDE goals and KSHSAA goals align in the success of each student?
- 2) Considering that Kansas Community Colleges no longer have to roster half of their teams with Kansas kids, do the rules of the KSHSAA limit Kansas student-athletes too much? Do we not want them to have equal opportunity to gain athletic scholarships as kids from other states?
- 3) Why is it acceptable for a student-athlete to play middle/high school basketball and play club volleyball at the same time, but it is not acceptable for a middle/high school basketball player to play club basketball at the same time? Especially at the middle school level, where there are no State Championships, why do we limit kids from gaining extra experience? If the KSHSAA rules do not allow outside competition for same sport season, then KSHSAA needs to designate middle school seasons to be fair to all Kansas middle school/junior high student-athletes.
- 4) Why do we allow gifted middle school students the opportunity to take high school courses, but we don't allow gifted student-athletes the opportunity to compete in high school? Why is the 9th grade year the split? In many leagues, 7th graders can only play with other 7th graders, and 8th graders the same. Why? The same is not true for high school or college. Children develop at different rates academically, physically, emotionally, and is it not past time to consider what we are doing for kids rather than to them?
- 5) Why are there 9-14 states that allow middle schoolers to play high school sports, but we don't? We have some of the same demographic issues, so why are we holding kids back from getting better? Student-athletes are now taking roster spots and scholarships from our kids...shouldn't we be helping to promote them to receive that money rather than allowing it to go to out-of-state students?
- 6) With no middle school state championships, why don't we allow immediate eligibility with all middle school sports? Are we doing what's best for kids in not allowing middle school students to play based upon a transfer?