

Out-of-Season Participation

A Summary of MPSSAA and MCPS Standards and Regulations Regarding Out-of-Season Activities Involving School Teams and School Coaches

The following is a summary of applicable Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA) and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) standards and regulations regarding out-of-season activities involving school teams and school coaches. The summary also includes limitations regarding the extent of contact that school coaches may have with returning players beyond the defined sports season.

The summary addresses the following standards and regulations:

- A. Fundamental Points
- B. Camps
- C. Conditioning Programs
- D. Coaching Returning Players on Non-School Teams
- E. MCPS Interpretations
- F. Definition of a Non-school Team
- G. Practice and Game Limitations
- H. Coaching Returning Players on an Individual Basis

A. Fundamental Points

1. One important point always to bear in mind is that school teams may not, under any circumstance, practice, compete, or meet beyond the established MPSSAA sports season. The established MPSSAA sports season begins with the first practice allowed for that season, and ends with the state championship for that sport.

This important point is true whether applied to camps, playing in summer or out-of-season leagues, or participating in conditioning programs. This important point is essential in understanding applicable MPSSAA and MCPS regulations and guidelines.

2. A second important fundamental point is that rules and regulations that pertain to school coaches extend to volunteer coaches and all other school personnel. Rules violations involving school teams practicing or assembling beyond the established sports season may occur even though a paid coach is not directly involved.
3. A third important fundamental point is that if a team has violated an MPSSAA regulation, there is a precise sequence of penalties that are applied. The minimum penalty for a state violation is a forfeit, and sanctions against the coach, player(s), or both. In this fashion, no matter how small a state violation may appear, a forfeit and sanctions will automatically be applied as the minimal penalty. If the violation occurs in the summer, or before the start of the season, then the forfeit applies to the opening game(s) of the ensuing season.

B. Camps

1. It is illegal for a school team to attend a camp as a team because school teams may not practice, compete, or assemble out-of-season.
2. However, it would not be illegal for a group of players from the same school to attend a camp. There is a fine but important distinction between the two.
3. What is the difference between a school team and a group of players from the same team?
 - If the school coach is involved with the camp arrangements, including the collection of fees, then the group becomes a school team (illegal).
 - If attendance or participation in the camp is mandatory, then the group becomes a school team (illegal).
 - If school money (including booster clubs and money derived from fundraisers) is used to pay for camp fees or expenses, the group becomes a school team (illegal).
 - If the coach supervises, instructs, or coaches returning players at the camp, the group becomes a school team (illegal).
 - Coaches may attend camps and observe returning players, but they may not coach, supervise, or instruct them except as provided below.
4. When can a school coach provide instruction to returning players at a camp?
 - A school coach may instruct returning players if the camp is oriented to individual skills. For instance, school coaches may instruct returning players in a particular position or skill area if the players are part of a larger group of players representing multiple schools.
5. What is considered a “returning” player?
 - A player who has previously participated in that sport at that high school is considered a returning player, whether the participation was on the varsity or junior varsity level.
 - Incoming 9th grade students are not considered as “returning” players.
6. May a school host a camp?
 - Yes. However, no returning players from the school may participate in the camp if it is conducted or sponsored by the program/school or persons associated with the program/school.
 - Returning players may be used as camp counselors. When functioning as camp counselors, returning players are not considered as camp participants.
 - MCPS schools conducting camps must complete the form entitled *MCPS Application for Summer Camps/Activities*.
7. Can a group of coaches/schools get together and create a camp?
 - No. The camp must have an official, bona fide camp sponsor, and a camp administration, completely separate from the participating teams. Participating schools or coaches may not be involved in sponsoring or administering the camp. If the above criteria is satisfied, then the camp takes on the appearance of a true camp, as opposed to a group of coaches running joint out-of-season practices

C. Conditioning Programs

1. Individual teams may not conduct conditioning programs beyond the sports season. This would be considered as practicing outside of the sport season.
2. However, schools may conduct voluntary, “all-school” conditioning programs. An “all-school” conditioning program would include the following elements:
 - Participation is voluntary.
 - The conditioning program must be advertised and available to all students in the school.
 - The conditioning program is conducted at the school site, by school personnel.
 - The conditioning program is oriented exclusively toward conditioning of a general nature – not specific sports-related skills.
- Conditioning programs must adhere to standards and guidelines described under Conditioning Programs in the *MCPS High School Athletics Handbook*.
3. What school equipment may be used in conditioning programs?
 - Sport-specific equipment, including pads and protective equipment, may not be used outside the sports season. The use of sport-specific or protective equipment lends strongly to the perception of an out-of-season team practice as opposed to an all-school conditioning program.
 - Blocking pads, kicking screens, balls, or other sports-specific equipment may not be used in conditioning programs.
 - Equipment such as weight room equipment, cones, agility ropes, etc., may be used because these are general in nature and can apply to most, if not all, teams.
4. Can a school coach supervise returning players from his team in a conditioning program?
 - Yes. However, the program still must be advertised and available to all students. The program may not be exclusively advertised for a particular team.

D. Coaching Returning Players on an Individual Basis

1. MPSSAA regulations do not allow school teams to practice or assemble after the season. School teams are defined as “Any school group or team gathering consisting of three or more players that has assembled for the purpose of drilling or instruction.”
2. The above opens the door for coaches to work with a limited number of athletes on an individual basis beyond the sports season. Specifically, MPSSAA interpretations specify that “School coaching staffs may work with a maximum of two players per day.”
3. Thus, school coaches or coaching staffs may work with a maximum of two players on an individual basis on a particular day outside the sports season. This could mean a pitcher-catcher, QB-receiver, two goalies, etc. Under no circumstance, however, may the total number of players per day exceed two, no matter how many coaches may be involved.
4. Guidelines 1-6 included under *Conditioning Programs* in the *MCPS High School Athletics Handbook* apply to coaching returning players on an individual basis outside the sport season.

E. Coaching Returning Players on Non-MCPS Teams

1. As mentioned previously, a school team may not practice or compete beyond the parameters of the MPSSAA sports season. These parameters begin on the first day of practice, and end upon conclusion of the playoffs (state championship).
2. Similarly, a school coach may not instruct or coach returning players beyond the defined MPSSAA sports season unless the players are on a non-school team coached by the school coach.
3. If the school coach is the coach of a non-school team, the number of returning players that can be on the non-school team is determined by the calendar, as indicated below:

MPSSAA “Eighty-Percent” Rule

- From the first practice of fall sports (mid-August) to the last spring sport state championship (late-May), the non-school team may include a maximum of 80% of what would constitute a starting line-up for that sport.
- For instance, eleven players would constitute a starting lineup for a soccer team. Eighty-percent of eleven, rounded down to the nearest whole number, is eight. Thus, if the school coach is the coach of a non-school soccer team, between mid-August and late-May, a maximum of eight returning players may be on the non-school team.

MPSSAA Unrestricted Period

- From the last spring state championship (late-May) until the first practice for fall sports (mid-August), there is no MPSSAA limit on the number of returning players that the school coach may coach on a non-school team.

F. MCPS Interpretations

An asterisk (*) will be indicated in many instances in the sections that follow. The asterisk (*) indicates an interpretation by MCPS regarding the applicable MPSSAA regulations.

An MCPS interpretation is not a specific regulation. MCPS does not have jurisdiction over non-MCPS teams. However, MCPS interpretations are important because they provide guidelines to assist schools, teams, and coaches from “crossing the line” from a non-school team to a school team. MCPS interpretations are intended to assist schools and coaches in establishing clear parameters.

If there is a question of whether a team has violated a regulation, MCPS will apply the interpretations that are offered to assist in determining whether a violation has occurred.

G. Definition of a Non-School Team

1. The team must be affiliated with a league that satisfies MPSSAA regulations (league must be operated by a non-profit organization or educational institution outside the school system). The MCPS Interpretation would require that the league include the following components.
 - *Either the league provides insurance for players/teams, or the league requires that teams in the league provide proof of insurance.
 - *The league determines the schedule, with a similar number of games for all teams in the league.
 - *The league has a commissioner (or a similar designation).
 - *The league provides specific parameters/rules for conducting games, including a specific structure for contests and league play.
2. The non-school team may not use a name connected with the school
 - *In many instances the name of a school is also the name of the community. Accordingly, the non-MCPS team may include either the name of the community, and not the school nickname, or use the school/community nickname, but not the name of the school/community.
 - *The non-school team may not use both the name of the school/community and the nickname of the school/community.
3. The non-school team may not use school uniforms or equipment
 - *School equipment includes any and all items owned by the school, including balls, cones and conditioning equipment. Briefly, other outside groups do not have school equipment at their disposal. Thus, a team using school equipment creates a clear link to a school team.
 - *Equipment discarded by the school (i.e. old blocking shields, balls) may not be used unless the school has sold or donated the equipment to the non-school team. For insurance and liability purposes, this transaction should be in writing. The discarded equipment must be stored at a site other than the school site.
 - *School uniforms include current as well as old or discarded uniforms.
4. The non-school team may not use school facilities unless the use is processed through Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF)
 - *The non-school team may not use the school facility, inside or outside, for practices or games unless it has followed CUPF procedures
5. Participation on the non-school team must be voluntary.
 - Coaches may not coerce or pressure students to participate on the non-school team.
 - Coaches may not imply or use participation on the non-school team as a factor in subsequent school team selection or playing time.
6. The non-school team must have proof of insurance.

H. Practice and Game Limitations

1. MPSSAA Interpretation – A maximum of one practice session per game or event
 - ***A team is allowed up to three practice sessions in preparation for the first league game. After the opening league game, teams are limited to one practice session per game or event.**
 - *The total number of practice sessions per week may not exceed the number of games or events.
 - *A tournament, or jamboree, or any other gathering of multiple teams is considered as one event, even though several games may be played in that event.

2. * The total number of games and practices per week may not exceed six.
 - *For instance, if a team has three games in a week, it is allowed a maximum of three practices (3 games + 3 practices = 6)
 - *If a team has five games in a week, it is allowed a maximum of one practice
 - *However, if a team has one game in a week, it is allowed a maximum of one practice.

3. Tournaments
 - *Sometimes the word “camp” is used to describe an event that is actually a tournament. If the event is exclusively, 100%, a tournament, then the event will be construed as a tournament even though it may be called a camp.
 - *However, if the activity includes any elements that are characteristic of a camp, the activity will be construed as a camp and not a tournament. To be construed as a tournament, the activity must be 100% competition oriented, with the learning aspect derived through competition.
 - *Even though a tournament may include multiple games, it is construed as one event. Thus, a non-school team may have a maximum of one-practice to prepare for tournament.
 - *As mentioned previously, a non-school team must belong to a bona fide league with a specific schedule of games. Though a non-school team may participate in tournaments outside of the league, the team may not compete primarily in tournaments. The majority of its games must be league games.