

NFHS

Officiating the High School Way

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By Joe Manjone, Ed. D.

It seems that at almost every high school rules meeting, someone invariably asks: "Why aren't high school sports rules the same as those used by other organizations? It would be so nice to be able to call games under one set of rules." This statement is true. It certainly would be easier on officials if all levels, organizations and leagues of the same sport used the same rules. However, this is not the case now, and it is doubtful that it ever will be. High school rules for most sports are different from the professional, international or college rules in those sports.

The reason that there is a need for different rules is simply because the goals and priorities of each sports organization and level are different. In professional sports, the spectator is a major concern, so many rule changes are made with the spectator in mind. These same rule changes are not needed for amateur or youth games where the participant is of primary concern.

Participation in high school sports is not as popular and almost unheard of in other countries. In most foreign countries, sports clubs rather than high schools govern and sponsor sport competition for youth. Sports in foreign countries are not considered an extension of the classroom as in the United States. Development and recreation are the primary aims of most club sport programs. The goals and the rules needed to govern international competition are different from high school sport rules.

The goals or priorities of all high school sports are education, safety, participation and sportsmanship. High school sports rules are made with those four goals in mind. Examples of how each of those goals affects high school sports rules are provided below.

Education. Sports are considered an extension of the classroom. In sports, the student-athlete is educated socially and physically, as well as mentally. Sports are an excellent medium through which this education can be delivered. The official is part of this educational process and must be able to communicate with players, coaches and spectators so that everyone is informed and can learn from the experience. To better enable this communication, meetings among coaches, players and officials

are mandatory, signals are utilized, and all cautions and ejections must be reported and explained to each coach. To properly educate the players and coaches about high school sports, it is extremely important that the official be consistent, call by the rules established for high school sports, lay aside rules from other governing bodies and concentrate on the game at hand - the high school game.

Safety of Participants. This is the biggest priority in high school sports. This is also the reason for the emphasis on the equipment check, the verification of legal and safe equipment by the referee and the rule that requires the official to stop the game when an injury occurs, no matter the position of the ball. Also, the rule that requires injured players to leave the game, when the referee stops the game for an injury is the result of this big concern for safety. Because of this stress on safety, coaches are also involved in the safety aspect of the game. It is for this reason that before each high school contest, the coaches must verify to the officials that all players are properly and safely attired.

Participation. Allowing more players to participate in the game and receive the many benefits associated with playing high school sports is a goal in all high school sports. This goal has resulted in the inclusion of liberal or unlimited substitution rules that apply in a number of different substitution situations. Also, timing rules that allow for more playing time have been added in some sports to provide additional participation.

Sportsmanship. Because sportsmanship is a high priority, a statement discussing the importance of sportsmanship is spoken or read to players and coaches before each game. A number of caution and ejection rules and penalties have been established to eliminate acts of non-sportsmanship. In addition, most schools have sportsmanship events for players, coaches and spectators, and many states offer sportsmanship awards to member schools.

With the emphasis on safety and sportsmanship, the “flow of the game” principle commonly followed in professional or college sports, has no place in the high school game. When the flow of the game is the major consideration, the referee tries to keep the game moving and the ball in play by disregarding minor fouls. However, these minor fouls later often result in retaliation fouls, poor sportsmanship and injuries. Safety and good sportsmanship - not the flow of the game - must be the main consideration when calling fouls in the high school game.

So, the next time you hear someone ask, “Why are high school rules different and why can’t all rules be the same?” - you can now provide the answer. The rules are made to meet the needs and goals of high school sports. You can also emphasize the goals of high school sports and what the referee must do to meet these goals. Hopefully, this knowledge will add to your enjoyment of officiating, and allow you to be a better high school referee.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Since 1959, Joe Manjone has collectively officiated high school soccer in the states of Pennsylvania, Georgia, South Carolina, Maryland and West Virginia. In addition, he has officiated high school basketball, baseball, football, softball, cross country, track and swimming.

Manjone, who served as the officials' representative on the NFHS Soccer Rules Committee from 2000 to 2004, served as chairperson of that same committee from 2008 to 2012. Since 2008, he has been a presenter in the annual soccer rules video coproduced by the NFHS and the National Intercollegiate Soccer Officials Association. He has written several soccer articles in various publications.

Among his numerous recognitions, Manjone received Distinguished Service Awards from both the National Intercollegiate Soccer Officials Association and the Alabama High School Athletic Association, and was bequeathed the High School Official of the Year Award by the National Intercollegiate Soccer Officials Association.

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