



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

2022-23 Points of Emphasis

Sportsmanship

Good sporting behavior is one of the fundamental ingredients to the continued success and enjoyment of education-based high school sports and activities. In fact, in the 103-year history of organized high school sports in the United States, good sportsmanship has been one of the most important outcomes of high school activity programs.

NFHS playing rules are written to encourage sportsmanship. Participation in these programs should promote respect, integrity and sportsmanship. However, for these ideals to occur, everyone involved in these programs must be doing their part.

The NFHS is concerned that unsporting behavior in education-based athletics has increased across all sports. As a result, the NFHS has made sportsmanship the No. 1 Point of Emphasis for the 2022-23 school year.

Sportsmanship, or good sporting behavior, is about treating one another with respect and exhibiting appropriate behavior. It is about being fair, honest and caring. When these types of appropriate behavior occur, competitive play is more enjoyable for everyone.

Coaches set the tone at athletic contests with their display of sportsmanship. If these individuals act in a sportsmanlike manner, their behavior sets the tone for players, spectators and others. If coaches, however, are complaining constantly about the decision of contest officials, spectators are more likely to do the same.

There must be a collaborative, working relationship between contest officials and game administration to promote good sportsmanship and safely conduct the contest. Everyone has their roles to play in creating a positive, sportsmanlike atmosphere at contests.

Officials should focus on the actions of players, coaches and other bench/sideline personnel. A positive, open line of communication between officials and coaches ultimately results in a better contest for everyone involved.

Contest officials, however, should never engage with spectators who are exhibiting unsporting behavior. Once the contest begins, school administration is responsible for dealing with unruly spectators. A proactive approach by school administration includes monitoring the behavior of spectators and intervening as needed.

If spectators are using demeaning or profane language at officials – or at others in the stands – those individuals should be removed from the contest by school administration.

In recent years, a heightened level of unsportsmanlike behavior has been occurring by spectators at high school sporting events, and it must be stopped. The use of demeaning language, or hate speech, by students, parents and other fans must cease.

High school sports and other activities exist to lift people up, not demean or tear people down. The goal is to treat everyone fairly and treat each other with respect. Any speech or harassment that is insulting, demeaning or hurtful will not be tolerated.

High schools must establish a culture that values the worth of every single person – both players on the school’s team and players on the opposing team. There must be a no-tolerance policy regarding behavior that shows disrespect for another individual.

Good sports win with humility, lose with grace and do both with dignity. It takes the efforts of everyone every day to ensure that sportsmanship remains one of the top priorities in education-based activity programs.

Reducing Illegal Contact

To maintain the sound traditions of all sport, encourage sportsmanship, and minimize the inherent risk of injury, playing rules are developed to serve the varying skill level for the involved participants. As a result, it’s incumbent on contest officials to enforce the rules as written. When officials allow personal philosophies to enter into their enforcement of the rules, unintended advantages can be provided to players or teams, advantages that can determine the outcome of a contest. The NFHS Basketball Rules Committee expects officials to adhere to the playing rules for high school contests as written. Participants should expect nothing less from contest officials on a nightly basis, and the enforcement of all playing rules should be made without regard for time and circumstance. A foul or violation in the first quarter is expected to be a foul or violation in the last minute of a contest. While some coaches may wish for the game to be called ‘looser’, officials should avoid giving into that mind set regardless of the location of the game or the participants involved.

Of particular concern for the committee is the growing individual interpretations of certain plays, plays that are increasing the amount of illegal contact being allowed. The type of plays listed below rise above the description of Rule 4-27 regarding incidental contact and need to be addressed by officials.

- **Hand Checks:** Rule 10-7-12 is very clear for officials to apply. During recent years, freedom of movement for players has improved, and officials need to remember the simple concepts of Rule 10-7-12 that prohibit defensive players from placing two hands, an extended arm bar, keeping a hand on an opponent, or contacting an opponent more than once with the same hand or alternating hands. Keeping these simple principles in mind are critical for officials and need to be ruled when they occur
- **Post Play:** While freedom of movement has generally improved, there is still a need for officials to pay attention to play in the post. From a review of nationally injury data, more basketball injuries occur in the post than any other place on the floor. Officials need to monitor play in the post, whether the ball is involved or not. Players who either illegally carve out space for themselves or defenders who repeatedly push, knee, or otherwise attempt to knock offensive players off balance need to be penalized for their actions. Failure to address the first illegal contact in the post when players are displaced often leads to more physical play from players who come to believe that more physical play is going to be allowed on a given night. Regardless of the player’s location on the floor, when a player’s rhythm, speed, balance, or quickness is impeded, a foul has occurred.
- **Off-ball play:** Keeping eyes on off-ball plays is also necessary to help reduce the physicality in the game. Officials need to remain focused on their primary coverage area and off-ball play is just as critical as any other position on the floor. Officials who tend to ‘ball watch’ will miss screening plays in front of them that involve illegal contact. Allowable action by screeners, cutters, and defenders are outlined in the rules, and officials who focus on their primary area will naturally officiate these kinds of plays with more accuracy and consistency. When either the offense or defense are allowed to play outside the screening and defending rules off ball, more physical and illegal play tends to follow. Even if players are not initially in an off-ball area,

the official covering that space needs to remain focused on in their primary area and trust that their partners will handle plays in their areas.

In enforcing the rules as written, officials should also pay particular attention to the mechanics and signals they use, along with their interactions with players, coaches, administrators, and spectators. Enforcing the playing rules while maintaining appropriate composure and decorum is also essential to maintaining good sportsmanship and sends the message that the official(s) have called a good and fair game. Official need to demonstrate proper authority behavior at all times in their dealings with players, coaches, administrators, and spectators, recognizing their important role in education-based athletic programs.

Pregame Meeting - Addressing Illegal Uniforms, Equipment and Apparel

Rule 2-4-5 requires that game officials verify with each head coach, prior to the start of a contest, that the teams' uniforms and equipment are legal and will be worn properly, and that all participants will exhibit proper sporting behavior throughout the contest. Before and after this pre-game verification, officials should monitor players and notify the head coach if they notice anything needing to be addressed, including the color of uniforms, undershirts/undergarments, jewelry, casts, braces, or hair control devices. All game officials are responsible for monitoring this. If an official identifies any uniform or equipment issue that is of concern, they should allow head coaches to address the problem and not take it upon themselves to deal directly with the player. Even during the pre-game period, players must be legally attired, and paying attention to these details in pre-game will set the tone for the contest.

To the extent practical, game officials should also know who the game administrator(s) are for the contest in the event they need to be called upon. The home management is responsible for spectator behavior, insofar as it can reasonably be expected to control the spectators. In the absence of a designated school representative serving as game administrator, the home coach shall serve as the host management.

Knowing who will help address any behavior or sportsmanship issues that occur will allow game officials to confidently execute their duties. Officials should not be expected to correct illegal uniforms, equipment, or misconduct, only to bring those to the attention of the people best positioned to remedy those issues on any given night.