

2023 MHSA and NFHS Football Changes and Information

MHSA Rule Changes

First Contest Date: The first possible contest for all 5 MHSA Classes is Thursday August 24th. When possible, discuss having games on Thursday nights due to low number of the available of officials covering Friday night games.

Post-Season Brackets – These brackets will be posted online at www.mhsa.org/footballpostseason

Football Reclassification: Major changes have occurred to the MHSA Football Classifications – See the last page for 2023 divisions.

Other important MHSA football safety issues:

- **Required Practice** –The minimum number of days of practice required before competing in a contest is **ten (10) days**
- What constitutes/satisfies an initial MHSA practice mentioned above:
 1. Practice must be at least one (1) hour long.
 2. At least one full squad (varsity team/J.V. team/C squad) and their coaching staff must be present.
 3. The athlete must participate in the entire practice.
 4. Practice should include the majority of drills and conditioning that are the norm for that team or squad.
 5. A practice the day of a game does not count (unless an athlete is practicing with another squad that does not have a game that day, i.e. a varsity team member who stays home and practices with the JV team that does not have a game that day).
 6. Warm-ups or walk-throughs with the team prior to a game does not constitute a practice.
- **New this year**, If a student transfers to a new school after completing the required days of preseason practices for their sport or activity, the student must complete an additional number of practices (equal to half the # of required practices for that sport or activity) at their new school. In football, the athlete would have to practice an additional five (5) days with the new school before they are allowed to compete in an association contest.
- **Acclimation Practice Time** - The first 3 days of football practice will be a period of acclimation with no contact and no pads.
- **Fitting Helmets** - Coaches must recognize the importance of properly fitting the helmet on each player.
- **Inspecting Helmets** - Inspect all helmets closely and look for any helmets that need reconditioning. Remember all helmets manufactured prior to 2011 cannot be reconditioned.
- **Helmet Warning Labels** - NFHS Football rules require that NOCSAE labels be affixed to the Outside of the helmet and each coach should review the warning language with players.
- **Heat and Hydration** - Enclosed with this Activity News is a new article from the National Federation of State High School Associations Sports Medicine Advisory Committee for coaches and administrators about heat acclimatization and heat illness prevention.
- **Sideline Barriers** - MHSA Rules and Regulations require schools to “erect sideline barriers for all football, soccer, and softball fields during contests.”

NFHS Rule Change for 2023

Clarified That Towels Do Not Have To Be The Same Solid Color For Each Player [1- 5-3a(5)a 4, 5 (NEW)] — Player towels may contain one manufacturer’s logo and/or one school logo neither exceeding 2¼ square inches. Towels must be a solid color but now do not have to be the same solid color for each player. Towels may not be ball- or penalty-flag colored.

Clarified When a Player Is Inbounds After Being Out of Bounds [2-29-1] — This change clarifies when a player is inbounds after being out of bounds. There is no change to any foul or subsequent penalty provisions, or any rules related to illegal participation or the provisions regarding eligibility to catch a pass.

Added A List of Criteria to Help Identify Players Who Should Be Defined as Defenseless Receivers [2-32-16d (NEW), 9-4-3g] — This change adds to the list of criteria to help identify players who should be defined as defenseless receivers related to application of unnecessary or excessive contact. This clarification should help game officials and coaches by defining allowable contact against defenseless receivers.

Intentional Grounding Exception Changed [7-5-2d EXCEPTION 2a, c (NEW), TABLE 7-5-2 d EXCEPTION 2a, c (NEW), TABLE 7-5 (1)d EXCEPTION 2a, c (NEW)] — This change permits the exception for intentional grounding to the first and only player to possess the ball after the snap ends. **This rule only applies to 11-player and 8-player football.**

Removed “Intentional” From Pass Interference in TABLE 7-5 [TABLE 7-5 2c (DELETED), 7-5 PENALTY] — By removing “intentional” from pass interference, this change puts the rule in line with how it is already enforced which is a 15-yard penalty.

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Changes In Basic Spot Penalty Enforcement [10-4, TABLE 10-4 (NEW), 10-6 (DELETED)] — This change restructures and clarifies the amendments to Rule 10 to eliminate the excessive penalty enforcements for offensive fouls that occur behind the line of scrimmage. This revision stipulates the basic spot for enforcement of fouls behind the line of scrimmage is the previous spot rather than the spot of the foul unless otherwise specified by rule. Current penalties for illegal kicking, batting and participation fouls, and provisions for offensive fouls occurring in the end zone that may result in a safety remain intact.

Clarification On The Ball Being Handed Forward On A Running Play [Six-Player – Rule 7g (NEW)] — The change allows the ball to be handed forward on a running play, including to the guards/ends, while prohibiting handing the ball to the snapper provided both players are behind the neutral zone.

2023-24 MHSA Class AA Football Alignment				
	Eastern Division		Western Division	
1		Belgrade		Butte
2		Billings Senior		Flathead (Kalispell)
3		Billings Skyview		Glacier (Kalispell)
4		Billings West		Helena
5		Bozeman		Helena Capital
6		Gallatin (Bozeman)		Missoula Big Sky
7		Great Falls		Missoula Hellgate
8		Great Falls CMR		Missoula Sentinel

2023-24 MHSA Class A Football Alignment				
	Eastern Division		Western Division	
	Northeast Conference	Southeast Conference	Southwest Conference	Northwest Conference
1	Custer Co. (Miles City)	Billings Central	Beaverhead Co. (Dillon)	Bigfork
2	Dawson Co. (Glendive)	East Helena	Butte Central	Browning
3	Fergus (Lewistown) /Winnett/Grass Range	Hardin	Corvallis	Columbia Falls
4	Havre	Laurel	Frenchtown	Libby
5	Sidney	Lockwood	Hamilton	Polson
6		Park (Livingston)	Stevensville	Ronan
7				Whitefish

2023-24 MHSA Class B Football Alignment				
	East	North	South	West
1	Baker	Conrad	Broadwater (Townsend)	Anaconda
2	Colstrip	Cut Bank	Columbus	Florence-Carlton
3	Huntley Project (Worden)	Fairfield / Augusta	Jefferson (Boulder)	Lincoln Co. (Eureka)
4	Joliet	Glasgow / Hinsdale / Nashua	Manhattan	Loyola Sacred Heart (Missoula)
5	Red Lodge / Roberts	Malta / Whitewater / Saco / Dodson	Sweet Grass Co. (Big Timber)	Thompson Falls
6	Roundup	Wolf Point /Frazer/Lustre Christian	Three Forks / Willow Creek	Whitehall / Harrison
7	Shepherd			

2023-24 MHSA 8 Player Football Alignment					
	East	Southeast	South Central	North	West
1	Circle	Carter Co. (Ekalaka)	Cascade	Belt	Arlee
2	Culbertson	Forsyth	Choteau	Chinook	Charlo
3	Fairview	Lame Deer (JV)	Drummond / Granite	Fort Benton	Darby
4	Plentywood	Lodge Grass	Ennis	Harlem / Turner	Plains
5	Poplar	Park City	Lone Peak (Big Sky)	Hays Lodgepole (JV)	Saint Ignatius
6	Scobey / Opheim	Powder River Co. (Broadus)	Manhattan Christian	Rocky Boy	Superior
7	Wibaux	St Labre (Ashland)	Powell Co. (Deer Lodge)	Shelby	Troy
8			Seeley-Swan		Valley Christian
9			Sheridan		Victor
10			Simms		

2023-24 MHSA Class C - 6 Player Football Alignment					
	East	Central	North	South	West
1	Bainville	Centerville	Big Sandy	Absarokee	Alberton
2	Brockton	Denton/Stanford/Geyser/Geraldine	Box Elder	Bridger	Gardiner
3	Froid / Medicine Lake	Great Falls Central	Chester-Joplin-Inverness	Broadview / Lavina	Hot Springs
4	Garfield Co. (Jordan)	Harlowton-Ryegate/Judith Gap	Heart Butte	Custer / Hysham / Melstone	Lima
5	Lambert / Richey	Highwood	North Star (Rudyard)	Fromberg / Belfry	Lincoln
6	Plevna	Hobson/Moore	Power / Dutton-Brady	Northern Cheyenne (JV)	Noxon
7	Savage	Roy / Winifred	Sunburst (No. Toole Co.)	Plenty Coups (JV)	Twin Bridges
8	Terry		Valier	Reed Point / Rapelje	West Yellowstone
9	Westby/Grenora			Shields Valley	White Sulphur Springs
10					