



OUT-OF-SEASON PARTICIPATION
MPSSAA & MCPS Standards & Regulations
Regarding Out-of-Season Activities Involving
School Teams & School Coaches
Updated March 2023

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. [These standards and regulations incorporate new MPSSAA regulations that allow for school-sponsored summer camps and participation in NFHS and MPSSAA sanctioned out-of-season events.](#)

The summary addresses the following standards and regulations:

- A. Fundamental Points
- B. Conditioning Programs
- C. [NFHS & MPSSAA Sanctioned Out-of-Season Events – New](#)
- D. [Summer Camps \(School Sponsored\) – New starting Summer 2023](#)
- E. Camps (Non-school)
- F. Coaching Returning Players on an Individual Basis
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- H. MCPS Interpretations
- I. Definition of a Non-school Team
- J. Practice and Game Limitations

A. Fundamental Points

1. One important point always to bear in mind is that school teams may not practice, compete, or meet beyond the established MPSSAA sports season, unless they are participating in approved activities as outlined in these standards. 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. 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. 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.
 - The conditioning program adheres to all MCPS health & safety rules and procedures.
 - 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. 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.

C. NFHS & MPSSAA Sanctioned Out-of-Season Events – New

MPSSAA

Regulation 13A.06.03.03A(5) Sanctioned Events:

Local school systems may approve the participation of member schools to practice and compete in sanctioned National Federation of High Schools (NFHS) and MPSSAA events outside the defined sports season.

Interpretation:

Local school systems (LSS) who authorize member schools to participate in bon-a-fide sanctioned NFHS and MPSSAA events outside the defined sport season may authorize school teams to practice eight **(8) days** prior to the first day of the event the member school has obtained approval for from the LSS. Practice and participation must meet all local and state regulations applied during in-season participation.

MCPS-Specific Criteria:

Timing & Logistics

- Practices may begin eight calendar days prior to the first day of the event. Practices are not allowed on Sundays.
- Practices are limited to two hours in length, similar to the regular season.
- Building use for practices must be secured through the Community Use of Public Facilities. If local school facilities are not available (due to construction, maintenance, etc.), the school may secure an alternate MCPS school facility.

Approval

- Events must be sanctioned by the NFHS and MPSSAA and appear on the list of approved, sanctioned events.
- Participation must be approved by the local school athletics specialist and principal.
- Field trip packets and approval must be secured regardless of the distance traveled or overnight status.
- Supervision plans must be completed and approved using the MCPS Supervision Action Plan & Template.
- Travel distance must comply with regulations and limitations outlined in the *MCPS High School Athletics Handbook*.

Finances

- Athletics funds may be used to cover the cost of registration and transportation – coded 05 (fees) for the applicable sport.
- Hotels, meals, and other incidental expenses must be reflected and accounted for in the field trip application packet.
- MCPS bus transportation may be used, pending availability.

Coach Eligibility

- Only approved/rostered MCPS coaches may coach students (all MCPS and MPSSAA rules apply).
- All coach eligibility standards outlined in the MCPS High School Athletics Handbook apply (including courses and CPR/AED certification).

Student Eligibility

- Students must secure parent permission through the field trip approval process.
- Students must have been on the roster for the sport during the previous season and finished the season in good standing, in order to participate in an event during the subsequent offseason. Seniors who have exhausted their eligibility in that sport are not eligible to participate.
- Students must have a valid physical in order to participate.

Equipment and Uniforms

- School equipment may be used for practices and team activities.
- School uniforms may be worn while participating in sanctioned events.

Health & Safety

- All MCPS health and safety protocols and procedures apply. This includes but is not limited to weather guidelines, concussion protocols, school emergency plans, and access to AEDs.
- Athletic trainers are provided summer hours. Athletic trainers should be onsite to the extent possible for team practices. Athletics specialists will approve this schedule.

Hosting an Event

- Schools may host an event, per NFHS and MPSSAA procedures and protocols. Approval must be secured and the event must be officially sanctioned.
- Approval must be secured through the MCPS Department of Athletics, including submission of a comprehensive plan that addresses all aspects of event operations. Events and plans must be approved by the host principal(s) and athletics specialist(s).
- Building use forms must be completed through the Community Use of Public Facilities.
- Applicable forms must be completed if collecting fees, paying officials, etc.

D. Summer Camps (School Sponsored) – MCPS Approved Summer Camp Guidelines

The following guidelines are MCPS interpretations of the [MPSSAA Summer Camp Guidance](#).

MPSSAA

Local School System Approved Summer Camp: a series of training sessions that is sponsored and approved by the local school system involving skill development, instructional activities, and game situations within an individual local school system approved summer camp

Interpretation: Local school systems may sponsor a camp that meets the following criteria:

1. After the last game of the Spring State Championships and concludes on the final Saturday in July.
2. Camps per sport may not exceed 12 individual days. Local School Systems shall approve the number of hours allowed per day of camp.
3. Camps may not consist of contact for collision sports as defined in the MPSSAA [Recommendations to Strengthen Concussion Safety](#). **Helmets, pads, and full equipment are not allowed for football.**
4. Only coaches approved by the local school system may conduct school-sponsored camps. Guest instructors are allowed per local school system guidelines.
5. Only students approved by the local school system may participate in approved summer camps
6. Skill development and instruction activities are allowed, including game situations within an individual local school system approved summer camp. Game situations may only occur within the parameters of the camp and may not lead to inter-school scrimmages/competitions.
7. Local school systems may operate multi-school camps. Game situations may only occur within the parameters of the camp and may not lead to multi-camp scrimmages/competitions.

MCPS-Specific Criteria:

These rules apply to the new MPSSAA-permitted summer camps that are sponsored by MCPS and MCPS high schools. Non-MCPS/School-sponsored camps must continue to follow the guidelines in this document and in the MCPS Camp/Clinic Guidelines.

Non-school team activities must be conducted 100% separately from the new MPSSAA-permitted summer camps and follow all Out-of-Season Guidelines outlined on pages 35-36 of the [MPSSAA Handbook](#), the MCPS High School Athletics Handbook, and this document. Failure to follow the guidelines below will result in an MPSSAA violation related to out-of-season practices.

Summer Camp Objective: Instruction and Skill Development, while promoting the R.A.I.S.E. core values of Equity and Access

Timing & Logistics

- Camps are entirely **voluntary** for both staff and students.
- Each sport is permitted a maximum of 12 total days (May 30 to July 28) with each day lasting no more than three hours in duration. Days do not need to be consecutive.
- Camps may only be conducted Monday through Friday and may not be held on holidays and other systemwide closure days. Holidays include Memorial Day, Juneteenth, and the Fourth of July.
- Students participating in multiple camps/sports are limited to 3 hours (total) of engagement per day.
- Camps may not be run concurrently with non-school team activities/practices or youth camps sponsored by booster organizations or youth associations.
- Use of buildings must be secured through the Community Use of Public Facilities, per established timelines.
- If local school facilities are not available (due to construction, maintenance, etc.), the school may secure an alternate MCPS school facility. Athletics specialists and schools shall work collaboratively to ensure access to the facility and that appropriate supervision and emergency action plans are established and implemented.

Countywide Camps

- Countywide camps are allowed for impacted sports that include low and/or declining student participation, as designated by the MCPS Department of Athletics.
- For Summer 2023, impacted sports include field hockey, softball, lacrosse, and girls' wrestling.
- For combined camps (multiple schools), inter-school scrimmages/competitions may not take place between designated schools. Competition may take place if students are not grouped by their home school.

Approval

- All camps must be approved by the appropriate individual:
 - Local school camp – the host school's athletics specialist and principal
 - Countywide camp – the systemwide Department of Athletics, along with the host school's athletics specialist and principal
- Applications must be submitted electronically at least three weeks prior to the start of the camp.
- Each application must include the following in the approval request:
 - Host school and location
 - Dates/times of camp
 - Name of coach in charge of camp
- Supervision plans must be completed and approved using the MCPS Supervision Action Plan & Template.

Finances

- Schools may not charge any fees for camps.

Registration

- Students must register via Google Forms, similar to out-of-season conditioning programs.
- A medical card must be onsite and a valid physical examination must be on file.

Coach Eligibility

- Summer camps are official team practices and only approved/rostered MCPS coaches may work with students (all MCPS and MPSSAA rules apply).
- All coach eligibility standards outlined in the MCPS High School Athletics Handbook apply.
- One-time consultants may be used, similar to the regular season.

Student Eligibility

- Camps must be open to all students (including incoming ninth graders) and may not be limited to returning players.
- Only current high school students (including incoming ninth graders) may attend a camp. Other middle school and elementary school students are not permitted to attend a camp.
- Students may only attend a camp for the school in which they attend or will attend and at which it is anticipated they will graduate from or a county-wide approved camp. Students may not attend camps hosted by other schools (unless the camp is an approved county-wide camp).

Health & Safety

- All MCPS health and safety protocols and procedures apply to MCPS-approved summer camps. This includes but is not limited to weather guidelines, concussion protocols, school emergency plans, and access to AEDs.
- Athletic trainers are provided summer hours. Camp activities shall have an athletic trainer onsite to the extent possible.

Equipment

- Helmets, pads, and full equipment are not allowed for football. Blocking shields are allowed for use in technique and conditioning drills. Blocking shields may only be used for walk-through activities (not full contact).
- Helmets are allowed for boys' lacrosse.
- Goalie equipment (i.e. field hockey and lacrosse) and other protective equipment is allowed (such as catchers gear).

E. Camps (Non-School)

1. It is illegal for a school team to attend a non-school camp as a team.
2. However, it would not be illegal for a group of players from the same school to attend a non-school 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 non-school 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 non-school 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.
- Neither incoming 9th graders or current high school students are eligible to participate in the camp as campers
- 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 non-school 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.

F. Coaching Returning Players on an Individual Basis

1. MPSSAA regulations do not allow school teams to practice or assemble after the season, unless participating in activities outlined in these standards. 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 1-7 included under *Conditioning Programs* in the *MCPS High School Athletics Handbook* apply to coaching returning players on an individual basis outside the sport season.

G. 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, unless participating in activities outlined in these standards. 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 lineup 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.

H. 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.

I. Definition of a Non-School Team

1. The team must be affiliated with a league that satisfies MPSSAA regulations. The MCPS Interpretation would require that the league include the following components.
 - Either the league provides insurance for players/teams, the league requires that teams in the league provide proof of insurance, or the league provides an appropriate permission /waiver form for parents/guardians. Proof of insurance/liability is required.*
 - 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 comply with regulations outlined in the *MCPS High School Athletics Handbook* regarding the financial operations of non-school teams.
 - School or booster club funds may not be used for team expenses.
 - MCPS coaches may not be involved in the collection of monies for non-school teams and may not write personal checks for expenses.

J. 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.*