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The Schools Control the Rules of the OSAA

By Mike Wallmark, Associate Executive Director, OSAA

In 1918, a group of school administrators met in Portland to discuss the need for an organization to coordinate and regulate interscholastic competition at the high school level in Oregon. The minutes of that original meeting reflect a concern that attendees were uncertain who was “the legitimate representative of a school”, that some players were receiving extravagant gifts and that one group of players was “demanding money or academic credit” in return for participating in athletics.

In response to these shared problems, the 36 schools that attended the original meeting formed the “Oregon High School Athletic Association.” The name of the organization was changed to the “Oregon School Activities Association” in 1947. Since the member schools created the association, they also gave themselves control of its rules.

Where Do the OSAA Rules Come From?

Member schools agreed in 1918, as they do now, to follow the rules they jointly establish through a democratic process. Over time, the schools have chosen to expand the rules, usually in response to a shared problem. The specific process to create and modify the rules has also changed over time.

Currently, the broad rules that are the foundation of the Association are embodied in the OSAA Constitution which is divided into two sections – Articles and Rules.

The Articles section includes an explanation of the purpose of the Association, the make-up of the Association’s legislative bodies - the Delegate Assembly and Executive Board, and a delineation of school classifications and representative districts.

The Rules section identifies the responsibilities of member schools and stipulates the restrictions schools have agreed to impose upon themselves in order to conduct interscholastic activities in a fair and consistent manner in the best interests of member schools and student participants. At the heart of the Rules is “Rule 8 – Individual Eligibility” which sets the standards which must be satisfied in order for a student to represent a member school in interscholastic competition.

In addition to the relatively general concepts included in the Articles and Rules, the OSAA Executive Board has also adopted more specific Board Policies, Participation Limitations and Sports Season Limitations that govern how sports and activities are conducted in our state.

How Do Member Schools Change the OSAA Rules?

The OSAA Constitution mandates that all changes to the Articles and Rules of the Association must be sponsored by member schools and must be adopted by the Delegate Assembly following specific procedures and timelines. Members of the OSAA staff have no vote in this process. These procedures require that all schools be informed at least fifteen days in advance that changes are being considered in order to allow full discussion and response by all schools prior to consideration by the Delegate Assembly.

The Delegate Assembly is a 43 member legislative body which includes superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and assistant principals elected to represent every league of every classification in the state, as well as representatives of several other groups with an interest in the activities of the Association.

In addition, the OSAA Executive Board, a 13 member body which includes superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals or assistant principals elected to represent all classifications and regions in the state, as well as representatives of selected other interested groups, may modify the Board Policies, Participation Limitations and Sports Season Limitations of the Association.

Rule changes may be proposed by member school administrators, the Oregon Athletic Directors Association, the Oregon Athletic Coaches Association, the OSAA Student Activities Advisory Committee and the Oregon Athletic Officials Association, but any changes in the OSAA rules must be adopted by representatives of the member schools.

(The specific rule change procedure and timeline required by the Constitution is included in the APPENDIX of this document.)

How are OSAA Rules Enforced?

All OSAA rules are self-enforced. The member schools agree as a condition of membership to follow the rules that they have helped create, and to self-report any violations to the Executive Board.

The OSAA rules, like the rules in all other state associations, require automatic forfeiture of any contest in which an ineligible student participates. The Executive Board may also impose additional penalties ranging from a letter of sanction to fines, placement of the school on probation or, in the most extreme case, expulsion from the Association, depending upon the severity of the violation.

Are There Exceptions to the OSAA Eligibility Rules?

If school administrators believe that the imposition of the individual eligibility rule creates an undue hardship upon a particular student, a process exists in the rules whereby schools may apply for a hardship waiver of the rule for that student. The specific process varies depending upon the nature of the request. For example, a request from a school for a waiver of residency/transfer requirements for a particular student is sent to the District Committee of the league where the student would be a participant. The District Committee may also rule on academic waivers if the same student is applying for an exception to the residency/transfer regulations. A request from a school for a waiver of an OSAA academic requirement only, or any request involving age, foreign exchange students or a fifth year of eligibility, is sent directly to the OSAA Executive Director for disposition.

If the District Committee or the Executive Director grant a waiver, there is no appeal of that decision.

Does an Appeals Process for Denials of Hardship Requests Exist?

Appeals of a denial by the District Committee will be heard by an OSAA Eligibility Appeals Board made up of school personnel, school board members and lay persons. Appeals of a denial by the Executive Director are heard by the OSAA Executive Board. Appeals to the Executive Board that are denied may be further appealed to a Hearings Officer under Rule 9. Avenues for appeal through the judicial system also exist.

Conclusion

Through the OSAA, the member schools govern themselves by setting their own rules. The rules are self-enforced, and are constantly changing through a carefully defined democratic process.

Throughout the long history of the OSAA, the statement has remained true: The schools control the rules of the OSAA.

APPENDIX – OSAA Articles and Rules Amendment Process

10. Article 10 – Amendments

- 10.1.** The Articles of the Constitution of this Association may be amended by three-fourths vote of the Delegate Assembly members present and voting or by written ballot, provided the following conditions are met:
 - 10.1.1.** The proposed Article amendment is signed by four school superintendents, assistant superintendents, high school principals, and/or high school assistant principals. Each signee must be a member of a different Delegate Assembly district from any other signee. The Executive Board also may sponsor Article amendments.
 - 10.1.2.** The proposed Article amendment is submitted by superintendents, assistant superintendents, high school principals or high school assistant principals whose schools are members of the Association, or by the Executive Board.
 - 10.1.3.** The Executive Director shall receive all proposals and distribute them to all member schools at least 15 calendar days prior to a meeting of the Delegate Assembly.
 - 10.1.4.** The proposed Article amendment contains the exact wording.
 - 10.1.5.** A statement setting forth its merits accompanies said proposal.
- 10.2.** Any amendment to a proposed amendment for an Article of the Constitution requires a two-thirds favorable vote for approval by the Delegate Assembly members present and voting or by written ballot.
- 10.3.** The Articles of the Constitution may also be amended effective immediately without prior notice to member schools if the amendment is adopted by a unanimous vote of the Delegate Assembly members present and voting, or by unanimous written consent.
- 10.4.** Amendments to the Articles of the Constitution shall become effective August 1 following their adoption unless a specific date is included in the amendment.
- 10.5.** The Rules of the Constitution of this Association may be amended by a majority vote of the Delegate Assembly members present and voting or by written ballot, provided the following conditions are met:
 - 10.5.1.** The proposed Rule amendment is signed by four school superintendents, assistant superintendents, high school principals, and/or high school assistant principals. Each signee must be a member of a different Delegate Assembly district from any other signee. The Executive Board also may sponsor amendments.
 - 10.5.2.** The proposed Rule amendment is submitted by a superintendents, assistant superintendents, high school principals or high school assistant principals whose schools are members of the Association, or by the Executive Board.
 - 10.5.3.** The Executive Director shall receive all proposals and distribute them to all member schools at least 15 calendar days prior to a meeting of the Delegate Assembly.
- 10.6.** An amendment to a proposed amendment of a Rule of the Constitution shall require a majority favorable vote of the Delegate Assembly members present and voting or by written ballot in order to be approved.
- 10.7.** Amendments to the Rules of the Constitution may be approved without prior notice to member schools by a two-thirds vote of the Delegate Assembly members present and voting, or by written ballot.
- 10.8.** Amendments to the Rules of the Constitution shall become effective immediately unless a specific date is included in the amendment.
- 10.9.** The Delegate Assembly may amend or revoke Executive Board Policies, Participation Limitations, Sports Seasons Limitations and/or Executive Board Interpretations using the same procedures and satisfying the same timelines as listed in this Article for amendment of the Rules of the Constitution.
- 10.10.** The Executive Board may authorize non-substantive editorial changes in the wording of the Articles and Rules without review by the Delegate Assembly.