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Guidance for Member Schools – Situations Pertaining to Non-Interscholastic Competition, Instructional Programs, Open Facilities, Physical Fitness Programs, etc.

1. Can you define what is meant by “coaching” in terms of Bylaw 10-3-6 as well as Instructional Program regulations?

“Coaching” refers to any organizational or instructional contact with student-athletes in the sport for which a coaching staff member in a member school is responsible. Specific activities include but are not limited to: practice or other instructional situations in which the coach conducts specific drills, teaches skills, supervises game or competition-like activities or in any other way supports the instructional environment; game or competition situations in which the coach sits on the team bench, is in the direct vicinity of the competition in areas reserved for coaches and/or delivers instruction to athletes while they are competing. It is not a violation to be a spectator at a competition and sit in those areas reserved for spectators; however, the coach must be certain not to engage in those behaviors that are specific to the coaching task.

2. What may an interscholastic coach do with athletes from his or her program during the school year outside the season of the sport?

In team sports (baseball, basketball, field hockey, football, ice hockey, softball, soccer and volleyball) and in certain individual sports (cross country, track and field and wrestling) a coach may supervise open gyms, conduct fitness programs and converse with students regarding non-interscholastic competition/training opportunities. The coach may not state nor imply in any way that attendance at these permissible activities is a prerequisite for trying out for or being selected for the school squad. The coach MAY NOT: provide any type of instruction, either group or individual, coach players or play on their teams in a non-interscholastic program (involvement in tryouts, practices and/or competition) during the school year. This applies to all athletes in one’s program including one’s own children. Note: May 31 denotes the end of the school year.

In the individual sports of bowling, gymnastics, golf, swimming and diving and tennis, members of the coaching staff may coach students from the school where employed outside the interscholastic season of the sport. No coach may require participation until the official start of the interscholastic sports season.

3. What may an interscholastic coach do with athletes from his or her program during the summer from June 1-July 31?

This period of time from June 1-July 31 is considered the "summer" period during which coaches may have contact with student-athletes who participated in their interscholastic programs during the past school year. Members of a school coaching staff, both paid and volunteer, in team sports of baseball, basketball, field hockey, ice hockey, softball, soccer and volleyball and in the individual sports of cross country, track and field and wrestling may have a combined total of 10 days of coaching contact in either instructional programs or non-interscholastic competition programs. Football staff may have a combined total of seven days of instructional contact.

4. What is considered a "contact" day?

Instructional Programs

Any camp, clinic, workshop or other instructional format in which one or more student athletes from the coach's school are participating counts as one day of contact for that school coaching staff. Any instructional or organizational activity affiliated with the instructional program counts.

Non-Interscholastic Competition

Any game, tryout or practice in which students from the coach's school are participating together on the same squad in excess of the 50% limitation (2 in basketball, 3 in volleyball and ice hockey, 4 in softball and baseball and five in soccer and field hockey) counts as one day of contact for that coaching staff.

5. May the varsity coach have 10 days of contact in addition to the JV, reserve and freshman coaches?

No. The 10-day provision refers to the combined efforts of all coaches for that school. It is not permissible for each coach to have 10 days with his/her athletes separately.

6. Do volunteer coaches need to adhere to this regulation?

Yes. ALL coaches in public as well as non-public schools, whether they receive a salary or are volunteers, must be approved by their respective Boards of Education (or other governing board in a non-public school) and must meet all required coaching standards as stipulated by the State Department of Education. The only way that a person can work with student-athletes in an OHSAA member school during the interscholastic season is to have this approval and meet all standards. Thus, "volunteer" coaches are also accountable to the 10-day restriction as well as all other OHSAA bylaws and regulations governing coaches.

7. Does watching a camp program or a non-interscholastic contest count as one of the 10 contact days?

No. There are no restrictions on being a spectator at these events; however, coaches are cautioned that they must avoid any instructional or organizational contact (or the appearance thereof - see Q #1) during these events. Activities such as shagging balls, assisting with drills, functioning as a "gofer" during camps or clinics are considered to be organizational in nature and thus would count in the 10 day total for coaching staff members.

8. Does watching an "open gym or facility" count as one of the 10 contact days?

No. However, a coaching staff member who is either supervising the open facility or has simply shown up to watch must be certain that he or she has not been involved in organizing competition between two schools who just happen to appear at the "open facility." To organize team competition under the guise of an "open gym" or other facility is a violation of the provision prohibiting invitations and organization on the part of adults.

9. As a high school coaching staff member, am I prohibited from working with athletes who attend a 7th-8th grade school in the school district where I am employed?

Not necessarily. The answer to this question depends on how the high school coaching staff's contracts are stipulated. If the high school staff has specific responsibilities for the middle school (7th-8th) program, i.e., either contractual or de facto responsibilities for oversight, training, direct contact with those players during the school season, etc., then the high school staff would be accountable to the OHSAA regulations in terms of their work with all players in grades 7-12. If there were no responsibilities or affiliation with any 7th-8th grade school, then high school coaching staff members would have no restrictions placed on them relative to working with 7th-8th grade players either during the school year or during the summer period. Of course Bylaw 10-3-4, which regulates the number of players on a non-interscholastic squad during the school year, would be in effect.

10. What restrictions are placed on athletes regarding what they may do both during the school year as well as during the summer period?

The primary restriction is found in Bylaw 10-3-1. Very simply, while a student is playing for the school squad (from the time he or she plays in the first contest until he or she plays in the last contest of the season), the student may not tryout with, practice for or play in an actual contest with a non-interscholastic squad. The MAXIMUM penalty for violation of this bylaw is ineligibility for the remainder of the interscholastic season. Outside the season, that is prior to playing in the first contest during the school year and after the school season is over, a player may participate in a non-interscholastic program *provided the 50% limitation is observed. See the answer to Question #4 to see these limitations.* SENIORS OR STUDENTS WHO HAVE COMPLETED THEIR ELIGIBILITY ARE EXEMPT FROM THIS 50% LIMITATION. The school year is identified as beginning on August 1 and ending on May 31; however, some spring sports seasons may extend past May 31.

From June 1 - July 31 there is no restriction on the number of team sports participants from one school that may compete together in the same non-interscholastic program.

Regarding instruction programs, students in team sports may attend these (camps, clinics, training session, school workshops, other programs not affiliated with a non-interscholastic competitive program or league) ONLY from June 1 - July 31. The exception to this is for *individual instruction* only. A player may receive individual skill instruction from anyone other than a school coach at any time during the school year outside the sports season. Individual skill instruction is defined as drill structures and activities that do not exceed one player vs. one player. From a practical basis, such instructional programs may not be especially helpful to high school team sports athletes except at the developmental level; however, it is permissible to receive this instruction in an individual or group setting provided the individual protocol is observed.

11. What may I do in an open gym or facility?

Supervision of open gyms and the conducting of physical fitness programs are not considered as organizational or instructional contact. Thus, this type of activity is not governed by the rules that are specified as "Instructional Program" regulations or Bylaw 10 - Non-Interscholastic Teams. However, during an open gym or other facility, either at a member school facility or a non-member facility, coaching staff members may have NO organizational or instructional contact with participants. Likewise, attendance cannot be mandatory, no scoring or timekeeping is permitted, and the supervisor may not participate in designating who is to play on which teams. Note: It is not a violation for the coach or other adult supervisor to participate as a player in an open gym as long as the adult does not coach the students.

12. What may I do in a physical fitness program?

The rules governing Physical Fitness Programs do not permit the coaching or instruction of sports techniques and skills, and the equipment used to play the sport shall not be utilized. Fitness programs are commonly characterized by strength development activities such as weight training, agility and speed training and other conditioning protocols that may be specific to a sport. These programs cannot be mandatory or restricted to a select group of students. Issuing invitations, requiring make-up dates, requiring the taking of attendance and/or suggesting that participation will influence one's ability to be selected for a school sports team are all violations of these regulations.

13. Do seniors who have finished their eligibility in a sport count in the regulations governing both student athletes and coaches?

No. Seniors in team sports are exempt from the 50% limitations found in Bylaw 10-3-6. Coaches are restricted from any contact with players, including seniors, during the school year prior to June 1, except during the season of their sport.

14. What type of contact may a coach have with players during a "no contact" period?

Mandatory No Contact Periods are designed to provide for a break for students in team sports either between sports or at the time when other sports seasons commence. Coaches in the fall sports of field hockey, football, soccer and volleyball and the winter sports of basketball and ice hockey are prohibited from having an athletic or athletic-related contact with their players for 28 days after they have played their last interscholastic contest. In addition, coaches in the winter sports of basketball and ice hockey and the spring sports of baseball and softball have a no contact period starting 28 days prior to Labor Day and ending on Labor Day.

During these no contact periods coaches may not supervise open gyms, conduct fitness programs or engage in any verbal contact which promotes their sports program. There are no restrictions placed on students who may begin training with a non-interscholastic team immediately after the end of the season or continuing to pursue other types of activity in their chosen sport. The regulation restricts coaching staff members; however, it does include the following exceptions: awards ceremonies, all-star contests, communication to facilitate college recruitment, contact as a faculty member in the regular curriculum, contact as a licensed athletic trainer involved with rehabilitation and treatment, pick up of school-issued equipment, or attendance at OHSAA tournaments.

The following are examples of activities that have been deemed permissible:

1. A volleyball coach from High School "A" goes to the local YMCA to watch three of his players participate in a USAVB club tournament in February. **COMMENT:** It is not a violation to watch a non-school competition.
2. A school makes an announcement via the public address system inviting any girls who want to participate in an open gym for basketball to show up on Thursday from 3:30-5:30 PM. The school restricts open gyms to just students in the high school. **COMMENT:** This announcement does not constitute an individual invitation. Any girl may come to participate in basketball. A school may restrict this activity to just girls within the school and just the sport of basketball.
3. A non-public school announces via the newspaper and its website that there will be open recreation on its soccer field for boys soccer players. The school has decided that the facility will be open to any male, student or adult, who wishes to participate in soccer. **COMMENT:** The school may open its facility to community members as well as students at the school. Publicizing the announcement in a newspaper or on a website does not constitute an individual invitation.

The following are examples of activities that have been deemed a violation:

1. A coach gathers students on Sunday afternoon to practice throwing the football and performing other conditioning drills. **NOTE:** the use of a football is not permitted in fitness related activities.
2. A school issues invitations to students in grades 5-8 to join a weight training club at the high school. **NOTE:** OHSAA regulations do not address eligibility for students below grade seven. Prior to acceptance in a member school, but no earlier than January 2, students in grade 8 may not have any contact with interscholastic coaches.
3. Coaches from several schools agree to bring their basketball teams to an outdoor court for an "open gym" every Wednesday throughout the summer. The coaches attend to observe the activity. **COMMENT:** Whether the coaches transport students or not, this is a violation of the provision that these activities be unstructured free play. An arrangement for contests made by coaches and communicated to players violates the open gym regulations. This activity would have to count as a one of the 10 days of permissible contact for each coach.