

Editorial: A better option for high school athletes

NorthJersey 12:06 a.m. ET Jan. 8, 2017



(Photo: File photo)

The New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association, which governs high school athletics in the state, last week took a stab at bringing clarity to the rules that govern athletic eligibility for transfer students. The plan features a 30-day “sit rule” with few exceptions. That is, transferring students would have to sit out 30 days of their respective sport, or half the games, depending on which is less, starting with the NJSIAA-approved regular-season start date.

As The Record has reported in recent years, regulations on the transfer of student athletes in New Jersey have been in need of reform for some time. The current transfer rule allowed students to become eligible immediately, provided they could present a so-called “bona fide” change of address. Needless to say this rule was too often exploited, and sometimes led to confusion for coaches, students and their families.

The new transfer plan, which could gain fast-track approval from the NJSIAA’s executive committee as early as this week, is a reasonable step in the right direction. It may not be perfect, but proponents say the 30-day sit period is the shortest in the country. NJSIAA projects manager Mike Zapicchi said 24 states have one-year sitting policies.

Still, some in the high school sports ranks might see the 30-day time period as too long. The greater point is that with few exceptions, the rule would be cut-and-dry, and overall an improvement on the system now in place. The rule also states that if a student transfers after the first interscholastic scrimmage, or after the formal start date, he or she must sit 30 days with their new team, plus state tournament competition.

“What we are trying to address is a number of concerns,” said Zapicchi. “One, kids hopping back and forth from programs; two, kids going to multiple schools; and three, parents shopping their kids for programs.”

Certainly, these must be the days that try old-time high school sports fans’ souls. Used to be that kids grew up in a particular town and played sports for that town’s high school with friends and teammates they had grown close to over the years.

Those days are mostly gone, particularly in North Jersey, where private schools’ athletics have gained prominence, and where families and their children tend to be more on the move than in years past. Some students may be forced to attend a different school on a moment’s notice for no other reason than economics, divorce or a parent’s change of job.

Any rule the athletic association might put in place is going to carry with it pros and cons, and is likely to be challenged by someone. It is important to remember that transfers remain a relatively small percentage of the overall number of students who participate in high school sports. We also realize that even under the new plan, transfer and eligibility controversies would not die. Likely, however, they would be diminished.

The transfer plan on the table might have flaws, but it seems an earnest attempt to make the rules clearer and fairer for everyone, from parents to coaches to administrators, and to the students themselves.

Read or Share this story: <http://northjersey.news/2jgy09i>



The Mercedes-Benz Certified Pre-Owned E-Class
Rates as low as 1.99% APR* | Unlimited Mileage Warranty

