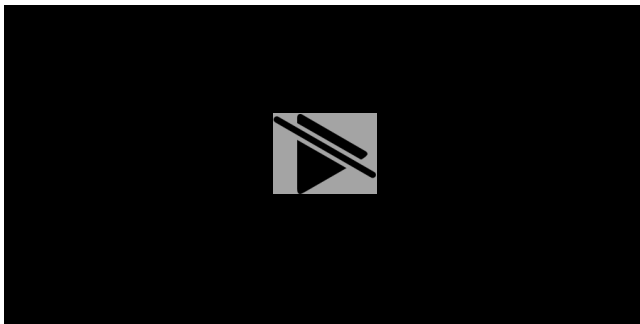


Insider: IHSAA basketball transfers are a bigger conundrum than ever

[Kyle Neddenriep](#) | Indianapolis Star 7:15 a.m. EDT July 8, 2019





You have heard this story before: A young basketball player comes up in one school system, develops his game, then — boom — he transfers to another school.

It happened at Crawfordsville. Orville Taylor transferred from rival Lebanon for his senior season and helped the Athenians win a state championship. The year: 1911. It was the first state championship recognized by the Indiana High School Athletic Association. In a twist, Taylor's new school defeated Lebanon in the championship game in Bloomington.

The point is not to bring up baggage from 108 years ago, but to preface what I am about to write by noting that transfers have been happening literally since the beginning of Indiana high school basketball.

But based on what I heard and saw at the Charlie Hughes Shootout, it

seems like — anecdotally, at least — the “transfer problem” in high school basketball is growing, particularly in Marion County and the surrounding area. One coach told me about a raw 6-6 player who initially had trouble catching the ball. The coach worked to develop him into a viable player in the rotation ... only to see him transfer to a rival at the end of the school year. Another key contributor for a Class 4A program showed up on another school’s team in June. Three players from a middle school program ended up at different high schools — none at the school it fed into.

There are plenty more stories, and I guess this is only a problem if you see it as a problem. Kids — and, ultimately, their parents — should be able to choose where they want go to school, right? The open enrollment law that went into effect in 2009 allowed students to change schools without paying tuition to the school outside their home district.

Which is fine and great. But what to do about athletics? The IHSAA allows transfers to have eligibility as long as, “you do not transfer from one school to another primarily for athletic reasons.” Or, falling under the category of undue influence: “Your parents or guardians have not been influenced by any person to secure you as a student or a member school.”

(Insert laughter here.)

It is a noble concept, but listen to Jaden Thomas. I was reporting on [a story on the new NCAA recruiting calendar two weeks ago](#) and how it might affect a player like Thomas, who plays at Class A International. We were talking about how important playing in front of college

coaches is to Thomas, who averaged 27.4 points per game last season and could clearly play at a 4A school.

He flat-out said this: "I get texts and calls every day about coming over and transferring to another school."

Not from college coaches. High schools. *And we were told AAU basketball was the root of all evil.* Credit Scott Adams, his coach at International, for taking it in good humor. "I think it's great," he said. "I'm offended more coaches aren't reaching out to him."

But that is the thing, too. Look on any high school coaching staff and you will find a coach — or several coaches — who coach grassroots (AAU) basketball. There is little delineation between the two, which runs in contrast to what you read or hear sometimes about good (high school basketball) vs. evil (AAU basketball). Many coaches are involved in both.

In 2015, the IHSAA passed a "past link" rule, which prohibits a full eligibility transfer if a student essentially follows his or her AAU coach/manager/trainer to the receiving school if they have played for the coach in the 12 months leading up to the transfer. The chain is easy enough to follow: Kid plays for AAU coach, high school hires AAU coach as assistant, kid follows AAU coach to high school.

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Only a fool would believe there are not ways to get around these rules

— or that the IHSAA could police all of the transfers. In most cases in Indiana, if administrators from both schools “sign off” on the transfer and there is no evidence of a transfer for athletic reasons, the IHSAA will allow full eligibility. IHSAA commissioner Bobby Cox has told me in previous interviews and conversations that the IHSAA — and other state associations — do not have the time or manpower to investigate every transfer.

According to the IHSAA, of the 3,167 total transfers for the 2018-19 school year, 92.3% (2,923) were granted full eligibility. Another 230 were given limited eligibility (junior varsity) and 14 were ineligible.

I have talked to Cox about the transfer conundrum before, and [how the IHSAA deals with transfers](#). When the open enrollment law went into effect in 2009, it further complicated the process. [Cox told me this in 2014](#): “I told (former Indiana state superintendent) Tony Bennett that the minute you change this (open enrollment), it’s not going to be about academics anymore. Look at where we’re at today. That’s why. It’s not about academics. It’s, ‘My kid isn’t getting enough touches, enough carries, enough exposure.’ That’s what it’s becoming.”

Other states have more black-and-white rules when it comes to transfers. Some require a one-year period of ineligibility without a change of address. Some have a semester. In 2018, Ohio strengthened its transfer rules after previously allowing eligibility after a transfer sat out the first half of a season. Cox said the flexibility within the IHSAA’s rules ultimately allows for more eligibility than ineligibility.

But after listening along the sidelines and [watching the Charlie Hughes Shootout](#), it is clear that the rules are something to work around. I got

a laugh out of Cardinal Ritter coach Ron Moore's tweet: "High school basketball free agency rumors are a close 2nd to the NBA."

So true. And I am honestly not sure how to feel about it. As much fun as it is to see homegrown teams build from the grade-school level on up, there is something to be said for having a choice on where you want to attend school and the coaches you want to play for.

It worked out for Orville Taylor.

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