

Change in High School Transfer Rule Will Open Up Recruiting

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The Legislature [has passed](#) and sent to Governor Jim Justice a bill that will significantly change the transfer rules for West Virginia high school athletes. [HB 2820](#) allows students in grades 9-12 to transfer one time for any reason to another school without losing a year of eligibility.

If Justice signs the bill into law, it will replace the current rule that gives students coming out of middle school the choice of their high school, but penalizes them a year of eligibility if they change schools during high school. Students are allowed to transfer without losing eligibility if their family relocates.

Senator Ryan Weld (R, Brooke) has been pushing the bill for several years, and he is gratified it has finally passed. "I think it gives kids the opportunity to make sure, along with their parents, that they can make a decision about where they want to go to school and not think about being forced to sit out for a year just because they transferred," Weld said.

Weld and other lawmakers who backed the bill said they just want to let the kids play. Philosophically, it is hard to argue with that. For nearly all of these students, their playing days will end after high school, so why not let them make the most of the experience?

However, these changes will not happen in a vacuum.

The no-excuses one-time transfer will inevitably trigger recruiting. That

is already against the rules. Secondary School Activities Commission* rule 127-2-9 states, "The use of influence by a person or group, connected or not connected with the school, to secure or retain a student for athletic participation is not permitted and may cause the student to be ineligible and may cause certain sanctions to be placed against the member school."

However, that rule is already extremely hard to enforce because there is rarely a paper trail, and it will become even more difficult with a no-excuse transfer policy. Coaches will be tempted to poach players from other teams. Some parents and friends will try to convince players to transfer.

Larger schools in more densely populated areas of the state will see the most impact. It won't be as bad as it was before the 2009 rule change limiting transfers when student athletes could switch schools as often as they wanted, but watch for a significant increase in uniform changes.

High schools in more rural counties won't see as much of an impact, but don't be surprised when the best player on a small school team gets recruited—er, I mean decides to transfer—to round out the roster on a larger school's basketball team.

And don't be surprised if the free-wheeling environment of college sports begins to trickle down to the high school level. The SSAC rules also prevent these amateur athletes from getting paid or receiving other benefits. However, perks and recruiting often go hand in hand.

The "let the kids play" argument is simple and it does resonate, and perhaps playing high school sports for the joy of participation and

representation of your school are relics of a bygone era. If so, that is a shame.

The rule change, if it becomes law, will be a step toward the dissolution of the last remaining forum for true amateurs in West Virginia sports.

(Editor's note: WVRC Media and MetroNews have a business relationship with the Secondary School Activities Commission. Our network produces and distributes SSAC championship events.)