

This week in HS Sports: No fair changing the rules in the middle of the game

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Williamson runs out to play Wayne County (Miss.) in its new on-campus stadium Friday, August 29, 2025, in Mobile, Ala. (Mike Kittrell | preps@al.com)Mike Kittrell | preps@al.com

This is an opinion piece.

The Alabama High School Athletic Association's long-standing effort to control recruiting in the state and provide fair play across the board may have taken a drastic turn Thursday afternoon.

Gov. Kay Ivey and Speaker of the House Nathaniel Ledbetter [are seeking an injunction against the AHSAA](#) that would force the group to allow student-athletes who accept CHOOSE Act money to attend private schools to play immediately.

Currently, and for decades really, any student who transfers to a member school and receives any financial aid is ineligible to participate in games for one year. The CHOOSE Act provides Alabama families with up to \$7,000 to spend on private education. About 23,000 students signed up to use the program this year, AL.com found.

A lot of people have a lot of opinions. Politicians are involved. Parents, coaches, principals all have their thoughts. I have my opinion as well,

and it is pretty basic and not one that has changed over the years.

The government should let the Alabama High School Athletic Association enforce the rules that its membership created. The people in the office on Halcyon Summit Drive in Montgomery don't work in a vacuum. Executive director Heath Harmon, who just finished his first year on the job, doesn't make the rules just like Alvin Briggs before him, Steve Savarese before Briggs, Dan Washburn before Savarese, etc., didn't make the rules.

Their job is to enforce the rules the membership – the schools in our state – believe are in the best interests of ALL students. The AHSAA's eligibility rules are not new. They've been on the books for ages and are designed to prevent the kind of team swapping free agency we are now seeing on the college level.

There is an ongoing debate about what exactly the CHOOSE Act states when it comes to athletic eligibility. In the statement released by the Governor's office late Thursday, Speaker Ledbetter said the policy clearly states the CHOOSE Act *will not* impact the eligibility of student-athletes." A release by the AHSAA said it *explicitly protects* the AHSAA eligibility rules. Obviously, both opinions cannot coexist.

Rep. Danny Garrett, R-Trussville, told AL.com Friday afternoon that the intention was never to create loopholes around the current AHSAA rules.

"We specifically in the law stated that the use of CHOOSE funds would not impact eligibility, and AHSAA incorrectly added that as a qualifier for eligibility in their rules," he said. "And that's not consistent with the law and was never our intent."

One thing is for sure, this all could have been avoided had lawmakers used specific language guaranteeing all CHOOSE Act recipients will be immediately eligible to play athletics at any school public or private governed by the AHSAA, the Alabama Independent School Association or any similar governing body for high school sports in Alabama.

I wouldn't agree with it, and I'm certain the AHSAA's Central Board wouldn't either, but it would be the clear law.

One more point and maybe the most important.

If rules are to change, let the adults settle this next spring before the 2026-2027 year not three weeks into the athletic season.

Unfortunately, I fear we are way past that.

Here is the good news. We have high school football tonight.

Maybe we should concentrate on the kids who have worked hard throughout the year, sweated in 100-degree temperatures in the summer and formed team bonds instead of taking away from their spotlight.

Thought for the week

"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything, give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

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