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## ***COOPERATIVE TEAMS***

### **A. BACKGROUND**

1. Various positive factors have motivated schools to create ways of saving existing programs and of establishing new ones, in an effort to increase overall participation in interscholastic sports.
2. Originally, the MIAA Board of Directors held hearings on a series of individual plans and then commissioned an ad hoc committee to study, during the 1989-90 school year, the entire notion of cooperative teams. On August 8, 1990, the Board voted to receive this committee's report. The Board approved a limited number of cooperative teams between Lawrence and Greater Lawrence; Georgetown and Pentucket; Drury, Hoosac and McCann; West Boylston and Tahanto; and between Rockport and Manchester. It then voted a moratorium on future cooperative plans until these experiments were properly evaluated. On May 19, 1992, the Board heard the evaluations of two of the experimental programs and voted to extend them for one more year.
3. Throughout the hearings and during the year-long study, recurrent problems surfaced regarding: (1) control; (2) organization; and (3) philosophy. Traditionally, the unit of the MIAA had been an individual school. The fundamental question was: How will a shift from this unit to one of **several cooperating schools** affect both these schools and the MIAA governance in this new model?
4. Philosophically, the Board has traditionally attempted to make reasonable ordinances for the common good of all student-athletes involved in interscholastic sports. Its ordinances at times must limit the participation of individual athletes for the sake of the common good. Inasmuch as cooperative team plans seem to shift the **emphasis** to the accommodation **of individual athletes**, the Board was concerned about how this shift in emphasis might affect the common good of its member schools and their athletes. Looming on the horizon of decision-making regarding cooperative teams are matters such as recruitment, fairness of competition, and displacement of athletes to name but a few. Also, athletic programs have traditionally been the "other half" of a given school's academic program. The Board was concerned that an athletic program involving



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members from several schools who are not involved in a cooperative academic program might be construed as an overemphasis of athletics.

5. Philosophically, too, the Board wondered about its ability to monitor programs which would allow all student-athletes to have outlets for all of their interests. The MIAA had always operated within the category of **school** teams. Could the Board reasonably expect to operate successfully within the category of **cooperative teams**, or would this shift in category slowly erode the very nature of the MIAA and eventually evolve into town or regional teams, like those in Europe, which would operate outside of the control, values, and organizations of schools and, therefore, of the MIAA?
6. The number of different possible groupings within the category of cooperative team was mind boggling. The shift from the interest patterns **of schools** to those of **individual** athletes is not amenable to simple formulas with regard to enrollment, geography, and the like. A good case can be made by athletes in small and large schools, as well as in urban and rural ones. While it is the case that there was precious little experience with cooperative teams on which to base judgment and decision-making, imaginative schemes of possible requests cautioned the Board to question its ability to cope with the demands which could be made on school and association personnel to govern what could become an ever-expanding and more and more complicated system of cooperative teams.
7. A shift from **school teams** to **cooperative teams** involved corresponding shifts in the way a school handles insurance, supervision, contracts, and legal disputes. Such a shift raises money-matter problems with regard to equipment, transportation, game receipts, coaches' salaries, facilities, officials, dues, ticket policies, scouting, meetings, and the like.
8. New and complex organizational problems with regard to responsibility and accountability had to be faced in such matters as eligibility, communication, educational values, and discipline. Self-interest and a "win-at-all-cost" spirit might tempt schools and individual athletes to shop around for "the best deal". Moreover, financial constraints must not motivate schools or school systems to proffer plans that would effectively limit the participation of the student-athletes involved. Widespread adoption of the cooperative team concept could have serious ramifications on league alignment and scheduling.
9. Recognizing its ongoing commitment and responsibility to both member schools and to



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their individual student-athletes, the Board wished to accommodate the needs of both in these rapidly changing and difficult times. Despite concerns about altering the nature of the Association and the mission of school activities, the Board accepted these potential risks in order to serve a small number of students among the Association's 140,000 annual participants (2013 more than 212,000 participants). The overwhelming motivation of cooperative teams in this matter is to provide additional students the opportunity to participate in interscholastic sports.

## **B. POLICIES AND REGULATIONS**

The MIAA Board of Directors has delegated the approval or disapproval of cooperative team applications to the host school District Athletic Committee (DAC).

Considering the Board's and the District Athletic Committee's experiences with cooperative teams, the Association must continue to set policies, regulations, and guidelines which can provide a workable structure for those member schools which believe it to be in the best interest of their student-athletes to propose plans for such teams.

The Board intends that these policies:

- ◆ Respect the goals of the petitioning school districts.
- ◆ Protect competing schools from competitive disadvantage.
- ◆ Guarantee increased participation.
- ◆ Ensure that no displacement of athletes occurs.
- ◆ Rest on a firm financial commitment by the schools involved to support a viable team.

### **Deadlines**

Any proposal to form a NEW cooperative team should be in complete form and submitted to the District Athletic Chair at least **six months** in advance of the initial practice date for that sport. RENEWALS of existing cooperative teams should be submitted at least **three months** in advance of that initial practice date.



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## Policies

1. A cooperative team is a result of thoughtful, deliberate discussion and decision-making among the leaders of the schools and districts involved. If the school committees, superintendents, school principals, and athletic directors of the petitioning schools are of one mind that a cooperative proposal is good for their students, schools, and communities, then the DAC will consider that “**local**” position.
2. If league members (or the scheduled opponents, in the case of independent schools or if competing against non-league schools in a sport not sponsored by the league) are convinced by those proposing a cooperative team that the proposal is appropriate and does not present a competitive threat, then the DAC will heed this “**regional**” evaluation and support.
3. A proposal should demonstrate that the cumulative student participation in the combining schools will be greater under the cooperative plan than it was during each of the previous two years. This requirement protects against cooperative programs being stimulated by the withdrawal of financial support by any of the schools involved. If either school has a sufficient number of students, then a request for a cooperative team will be denied.
4. No consideration will be given to cooperative proposals which result from the elimination of the sport due to financial cutbacks during the two years immediately prior to the request. Cooperative proposals will not be considered if they are driven by desire to “save money” at the risk of decreasing the number of potential student participants.
5. Cooperative team proposals will only be considered if they increase the number of student participants. Cooperative team requests will not be approved unless necessary to sustain a previously existing team or to create a new team, based solely on numbers, and not at all on specialized player positions.
6. Cooperative teams would only be approved if such was required to support a single varsity program. If sub-varsity opportunities presented themselves subsequently, then that would not interfere with the approval status of that varsity cooperative team. On the other hand, approval will not be granted for stand-alone sub-varsity teams.
7. For all sports that establish divisions by enrollment, all **approved** cooperative teams **will use the enrollment of largest school in the co-op for Divisional Alignments**. A school may not send students to two different cooperative programs in a single sport.
8. One school will be the host for all levels (e.g. sub-varsity) which are to be sponsored in that



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sport. (This does not preclude one host for a girls' sport and a different host for the boys' sport.)

9. A cooperative team cannot result in the displacing of students from the host school; i.e. host school students may not be cut from participation in that sport (at any level).
10. The host school configuration will continue to determine eligible grades for the cooperating school that included more than grades 9 through 12.
11. All liability associated with the formation and conduct of approved cooperative team rests with the host school which exempts the MIAA and its agents from all liability and responsibility.
12. Co-operative proposals must be limited to MIAA member schools.
13. Cooperative proposals will be granted for no more than two years.
14. Students of a disbanded cooperative team will have an opportunity to be grandfathered for their remaining years of high school participation.

*Grandfathering of Cooperative Team Student-Athletes*

*When a cooperative team is dissolved, or not renewed, the host school District Athletic Committee may consider a request to allow continued participation of guest school students provided they participated through the conclusion of the final season of the approved cooperative. The request of the District Athletic Committee should be initiated by the host school principal/athletic director, but only for those guest school students who participated throughout the entire final season of the cooperative program. In the request, these students should be listed by name and grade. The District Athletic Committee may grandfather these students for one or more years up, to their original graduation date. The request must be supported by the guest school principal/athletic director. This request should be submitted six (6) months prior to the start of that sport's season. (Clarified - 11/10/10)*

**Academic Eligibility**

All cooperative team athletes must meet the eligibility standards of their own school as well as the host school.

**C. GUIDELINES**

The principal of the host school should assure that during preliminary local discussions adequate attention was given to the following:

1. A sufficient reason for sponsoring a cooperative team
2. An appropriate name for the cooperative team



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3. Suitable practice arrangements
4. Fair competitive arrangements
5. Safe and adequate transportation arrangements
6. Provisions for physical examinations and medical coverage
7. Insurance provisions
8. The setting and monitoring of academic standards for eligibility
9. The purchase, repair, and cleaning of equipment
10. Source and control of finances
11. Guidelines for the termination of a given program
12. Use and maintenance of facilities
13. Selection, supervision, and payment of coaches
14. Selection and supervision of cheerleaders
15. Involvement of band and/or drill teams
16. Coordination of class/school schedules
17. Ticket prices and sales, disbursement of gate receipts
18. Student spectator and fan control and supervision
19. Cooperative team identity: mascot, colors, etc.
20. Award policies (school letters and certificate design)
21. Governance for the resolution of disputes
22. Identification of, and rationale for, programs eliminated within the past two years

**D. PROCESS**

The principal of the host school must:

1. Complete the online MIAA form: APPLICATION FOR A COOPERATIVE TEAM in the Members Only section of the MIAA website.
2. The District Athletic Committee(s) will not act on any request that is not supported by the majority of the league schools or the majority of the opponents (if competition in that sport does not occur within a league structure).

**E. DECISIONS**

The decision on each request will be rendered by the host school's District Athletic Committee. Approved cooperative teams will be listed on the MIAA home page and in Members Only.