



(Edited and republished: April 2007)

## COOPERATIVE TEAMS

### A. BACKGROUND

1. During recent years some schools have requested the MIAA Board of Directors to approve plans involving the formation of cooperative teams. Declining numbers and changing interest patterns have motivated schools to create new ways of saving existing programs and of establishing new ones, in an effort to increase participation in interscholastic sports.
2. In response to these requests, the Board of Directors has held hearings on a series of individual plans and 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 has been *an individual school*. The fundamental question arises: How will a *shift* from this unit to one of **several cooperating schools** affect both these schools and the MIAA governance in their service?
4. Philosophically, the Board of Directors 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 is concerned about how this *shift in emphasis* might affect the *common good* of its member schools and their athletes. Such matters as recruitment, fairness of competition, and displacement of athletes, to



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name but a few, loom on the horizon of decision-making regarding cooperative teams. Also, athletic programs have traditionally been the “other half” of a given school’s academic program. The Board is concerned that an athletic program involving 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 wonders about its ability to monitor programs which would allow all of its student-athletes to have outlets for all of their abilities and interests. It has always operated within the category of **school teams**. Can it reasonably expect to operate successfully within the category of **cooperative teams**, or will this shift in category slowly erode the very nature of the MIAA and eventually issue in town or regional teams, like those in Europe, which will 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 is 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, and in urban and rural ones. While it is the case that there is precious little experience with cooperative teams on which to base judgment and decision-making, imaginative schemes of possible requests caution 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** will involve 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 must be faced in such matters as eligibility, communication, educational values, discipline, and the like. 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 their individual student-athletes, the Board wishes 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 will accept these potential risks in order to serve a small number of students among the Association's 140,000 (now ~~170,000~~ 212,000) annual participants. The overwhelming motivation of coop teams in this matter is to provide additional students the opportunity to participate in interscholastic sports.

## B. POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

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

Because the Board's experience at this time with cooperative teams is so limited, it does not attempt to delineate *thematically* what they are or ought to be. Rather, it attempts to deal with them **operatively**, that is 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.
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 Board will consider that "**local**" position.



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2. If league members (or the scheduled opponents in the case of independent schools) are convinced by those proposing a cooperative team that their proposal is appropriate and does not present a competitive threat, then the Board will heed this “**regional**” evaluation and support. Non-public member schools located in the community or in contiguous communities with the cooperating schools should be given consultative opportunity to submit written positions and rationales, or to appear before the Board prior to its final decision.
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.
4. The proposal should demonstrate that students who participated in the program during the previous year are guaranteed the opportunity to continue that participation under the cooperative proposal. If each school has a sufficient number of athletes trying out for a given sport to field a team, then a request for a cooperative team will be denied.
5. 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.
6. Cooperative team proposals will only be considered if they increase the number of student participants, and will not be considered if they are driven by desire to “save money” at the risk of decreasing the number of potential student participants.
7. Tournament divisions will be determined on the basis of combined enrollments.
8. A school may not send students to two different cooperative programs in a single sport.
9. One school will be the host for all levels (e.g. sub-varsity) which are to be sponsored in that sport. (This does not preclude one host for a girls’ sport and a different host for the boys’ sport.)
10. Co-operative proposals must be limited to MIAA member schools.
11. Cooperative proposals will be granted for two year periods.
12. 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.



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### **C. GUIDELINES**

The principal of the **host school** should assure the Board 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
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 and submit the MIAA form: APPLICATION FOR A COOPERATIVE TEAM.
2. Attach to this form a written description of a program which adheres to Board policy regarding the following guarantees:
  - a. Support of the local educational leadership
  - b. Support of competing schools

Kindly note: 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



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opponents (if competition in that sport does not occur within a league structure).

- c. Non-displacement of athletes
- d. Increased participation
- e. Evidence that no school committee withdrew financial support from any existing athletic programs during the previous two years.

**E. DECISIONS**

- 1. The decision on each request will be rendered by the host school's District Athletic Committee.
- 2. Approved proposals will be effective for two years. If principals wish to renew a cooperative team plan, they should submit by the deadlines established by the host DAC a written evaluation of the program and the desire to continue it.