

Jan. 14, 2012

CONTACT: Craig Perry, Kevin Merkle or Howard W. Voigt / MSHSL

Penalties stiffened in effort to thwart unnecessary hockey hits

The Minnesota State High School League Board of Directors has approved a recommendation to stiffen several penalties in hockey that become effective immediately. The goal is to continue the League's efforts to reduce and remove dangerous contact that has led to severe injuries to players.

The recommendation came from staff, the League's Hockey Advisory Committee (girls' and boys' coaches), and officials association representatives.

The penalties for three infractions of the rules have been significantly increased in an effort to thwart players from making dangerous hits on the ice.

Checking from behind, which formerly called for a two-minute minor penalty plus a 10-minute misconduct penalty, will now become a five-minute major penalty plus a 10-minute misconduct penalty. The existing rule also states that any check from behind that is deemed "flagrant or causes the player to crash headfirst into the boards or goal frame" will continue to be a game disqualification. The disqualified player cannot re-enter that game and cannot play in the next scheduled game either.

Boarding, defined as a "check, cross-check, elbow, charge or trip" that sends an opponent "violently into the boards" now becomes an automatic major penalty — five minutes — instead of the option of either a two-minute minor penalty or a five-minute major penalty. The existing rule that also states that any boarding check that "causes the player to crash headfirst into the boards" may qualify for a game disqualification. The disqualified player cannot re-enter that game and cannot play in the next scheduled game either.

Contact to the head also now becomes an automatic major penalty — five minutes — instead of the option of either a two-minute minor penalty or a five-minute major penalty. The rule states, "No player shall make contact with an opposing player's head or neck area in any manner." Officials still have the option of assessing a disqualification penalty if warranted, and in that case the disqualified player cannot re-enter that game and cannot play in the next scheduled game either.

The advisory committee met on Tues., Jan. 10, at the League office. It was a regularly scheduled meeting set in June 2011. The committee members had already established contact to the head and checking from behind as ongoing areas of concern to discuss prior to the recent injuries of the two players who remain hospitalized. At the meeting the committee members immediately established a priority to address the issue of proper contact in the game.

The League's chief hockey rules clinician was also invited to attend and participated in the discussion. The boys' and girls' coaches on the committee quickly agreed that the best way to address increasing violent hits was to escalate the penalty structure and to get all parties involved to seek to change the culture of the game. The coaches need to accept the stiffer penalties and need to instruct their players the proper and legal ways of making contact with opponents. The officials need to make the calls and when the calls are made, they need to be supported by not only the coaches, but also by the players and the fans.

"Hockey is a great game, and when it is played the way it should be played, it should be a safe game," said Craig Perry, League associate director who oversees hockey. "The advisory committee's recommendations and our Board's support of the action continue our efforts to protect the kids on the ice, efforts that have been in place for a number of years.

"The rules book developed by the National Federation of State High School Associations has made checking from behind and hits to the head as points of emphasis since the 2004-05 season."

The League requested and received permission from the National Federation of State High School Associations to alter the three penalties cited on an experimental basis for the remainder of the current hockey seasons. The permission was required so as to not jeopardize the League's membership on the national rules committee.

An education module is now available online that details the rules changes. All coaches, officials and players have been instructed to view the education module and endorse its implementation prior to the next scheduled competition. The education module is also posted on the home page of the League website —

www.MSHSL.org. Another educational module employing video is also in production and will be available within a week or so.

The Minnesota State High School League, its coaches advisory committee and its registered hockey officials implore players, coaches, officials and fans to embrace this campaign to reduce some of the unnecessary and dangerous violence in today's game of hockey. The bottom line is that the players deserve a safe environment in which to play the game.

As Ken Pauly, head coach of the Benilde-St. Margaret's boys' hockey team and a member of the advisory committee, stated during the Jan. 10 committee meeting, "You can't tell me that we can't change the culture of the game."

— 30 —

MEDIA ADVISORY:

The League will conduct a news media briefing session at the League office at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 16. League staff, a coaches association representative, the League's chief hockey rules clinician, and the president of the League Board of Directors will be available to address this rules and culture change initiative.