Track and Field, Boys and Girls – 400m Dash Wheelchair Division

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Indicate the category of the proposed recommendation
State Tournament Recommendations regarding Format and Non-NFHS Rules or NFHS Experiments

Authors of the Proposal
MN Track and Field Coaches Association Activity Advisory: (Meghan Orgeman – President, Eric Klein – Vice-President, Aaron Berndt – Past President, David Boone, Jummy Barlass, Nathan Johnson, Tyler Warren)

Activity/Activities (Check all that apply)
Track and Field, Boys, Track and Field Girls

Current Rule/Policy
State the rule/policy as it appears in the current MSHSL Handbook or Activity/Sport Specific Rules and Policies.

MSHSL Wheelchair Track and Field Events

Each student will have the opportunity to compete in the following events: 100M, 200M, 800M, 1600M, 3200M, shot put and discus.
A competitor may be entered and compete in a total of four events (track and field), but not in excess of three track or field events in arriving at the combination of four. (Modifies Rule 4-2-1, 4-2-2).

If a competitor competes in three track events, only two events may be 800 meters or longer. The penalty for violation is according to the National Federation Track and Field Rules, (Modifies Rule 4-2-2). All individual and team points earned by that competitor shall be forfeited

Wheelchair shot put and discus will be divided into two (2) categories for both boys and girls based on the type of disability.
Category 1 will be for athletes with any disability of the lower extremities (such as spinal cord injury, amputation, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, orthopedic injuries).
Category 2 will be for athletes with disabilities that affect lower and upper extremities (such as cervical spinal, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, traumatic brain injury).

Proposed Recommendation
Submit your proposed change to the above-stated rule/policy.
Currently, the Minnesota State High School League permits the following events in wheelchair track and field: 100m, 200m, 800m, 1600m, 3200m, shot put, and disc. These are the events offered in Section/State tournaments. The 400m dash (wheelchair division) is not an allowed event in the state of Minnesota, and is therefore not an offering to wheelchair athletes at the Section/State tournaments.
We are proposing to have the 400m dash (wheelchair division) added to the list of allowable wheelchair events in the state of Minnesota, and subsequently be added as an offered event for wheelchair athletes at MSHSL Section/State tournaments.

**Include any other policies that are impacted by this proposal.**
No other rules/policies within the MSHSL Track & Field Handbook will be impacted by this proposal.

**Rationale**

**What is the history of the proposal?**
The League first offered wheelchair track and field athletics in Minnesota in 2011; initially, the only events offered in the wheelchair division were the 800m and the 1600m.

In 2012, the 100m and the 3200m (wheelchair division) were added. The rationale behind this addition, as stated at the time, was the increase the options available to wheelchair athletes. In time, those options have grown to include the 200, shot, and disc.

There is no language identifying why the 400m has not been added as one of the events, nor any rationale stated why it should not be added.

**How does your proposal benefit education-based opportunities and MSHSL Mission and Beliefs for all Minnesota students?**
MSHSL has founded its principles on promoting extra-curricular participation while establishing consistent and fair eligibility guidelines for interscholastic contests. Like all athletes, wheelchair athletes each have their own particular strengths and weaknesses. Just as a sprinter would have a harder time in a distance event, and vice versa, wheelchair athletes can display the same natural proficiency in one category versus the other.

Presently, a sprint wheelchair athlete only has two real options: the 100 and the 200. If they want to maximize their event potential (competing in up to three track events) they must go up to, at minimum, the 800m. Not only is this event outside of the strength range of most sprint wheelchair athletes, but it also occurs immediately before the 200m dash, making it difficult for the athlete to perform at their best in both.

This proposal to add the 400m to wheelchair division offerings will bring equity to the League’s event offerings and ensure that every wheelchair athlete has equal and ample opportunities to compete and excel within their particular strengths.

**What other policies are significant in this proposal?**
Generally, wheelchair division events mirror all other non-hurdle open track events, with the exception of the 400m. Currently, all non-hurdle open track events offered by the League in Minnesota are the 100, 200, 400, 800, 1600, and 3200. All of those are also wheelchair events, with
the exception of the 400m.

It’s worth noting, too, that the 400m dash (wheelchair division) is a standard event offered by both U.S. Paralympics and World and National wheelchair athletics, and is offered by many states, including Iowa, Wisconsin, Texas, Ohio California, Washington, Illinois, and Florida.


**Provide evidence of support for the proposal from other groups**

In April 2023, the Minnesota State Track and Field Coaches Association conducted a survey to gauge interest in the adding of the 400m dash. This survey was sent to coaches of all schools who have had a wheelchair athlete in the past five years (22 coaches in all). Nine coaches responded; of those nine, 67% of respondents (6/9) were in favor of adding the 400.

It’s worth noting, too, that of the three who voted against the addition of the 400m, two of those stated in the optional explanation of their vote that their “no” was simply because it would not be an event of interest for their particular athlete (for example, one coach said, “That event is too far for my athletes”), and not that they were opposed to offering the event for athletes in general.

Full survey data can be viewed here: [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Yt_xn__g-leohP7eiCFjlgMS7ryuOk_H9WdigmDrZw/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Yt_xn__g-leohP7eiCFjlgMS7ryuOk_H9WdigmDrZw/edit?usp=sharing)

**Impact**

**How does your proposal affect this activity, including its impact on all classes, areas of the state, and variety of schools?**

This proposal to add the 400m to wheelchair division offerings will bring equity to the League’s event offerings and ensure that every wheelchair athlete has equal and ample opportunities to compete and excel within their particular strengths. In particular, it will ensure that wheelchairs athletes with a particular strength in sprints—or, perhaps, a particular weakness in endurance events—will have the event offerings necessary for them to fully compete within their skill set.

**Administration**

**How does your proposal impact section and state tournaments?**

This proposal will minimally impact the structure of Section and State tournaments. The addition of the 400m dash (wheelchair division) will simply involve the addition of one more racing heat. The impact on Section/State meet time schedule would be less than five minutes. Given the rarity of wheelchair athletes in Minnesota, it is likely that most Sections would be entirely unaffected (as they may not have a 400m entry).

Regarding Section/State meet administration: the Association contacted Josh Gerber of Wayzata Results to get an estimated impact of this proposal. He felt the impact would be negligible and would “not be a problem on [his] end.”
The addition of the 400m dash would also have a minimal financial impact. There would need to be additional purchasing of awards for the event, but otherwise financial requirements would remain unchanged.

Length of Tournament

How does your proposal impact the needed competition time for section and state tournaments?
This proposal will minimally impact the needed competition time for Section and State tournaments. The addition of the 400m dash (wheelchair division) on Section/State meet time schedule would be less than five minutes, as it would be the equivalent of adding one extra heat. Many Sections would be entirely unaffected (as they may not have a 400m entry, or wheelchair athletes at all).

Participants

How does your proposal impact the number of participants/teams?
This proposal would have no impact on the number of participants or teams. Given the rarity of wheelchair athletes in Minnesota, most wheelchair athletes do not face competition until the Section meet, and are at no risk of failing to qualify. It is a near certainty that any athlete participating at State in the 400m dash (wheelchair division) is participating in other events as well.

How does your proposal impact the percentage of participants/teams that would qualify for the state tournament?
This proposal will have no impact on the percentage of participants/teams that would qualify, for the same rational presented in the previous question.

Facilities

How does your proposal impact the facilities needed to accommodate your recommendation at both the section and state level?
This proposal will not impact the facilities needed to accommodate our recommendation at both the section and state meet.

Awards

How does your proposal impact the number of awards at both section and state?
Awards for the 400m dash (wheelchair division) will need to be purchased at the State and Section level.

Other

Provide any other pertinent information not included in this proposal

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Position
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