

NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2025

[TSSAA 100: Tennessee before the Secondary School Athletic Association](#)

Imagine you're a high schooler in 1920, traveling with your friends from school to play football against a team the next county over. You're excited, that is, until you arrive to find your opponent appears to have three stout, 25-year-old coal miners on their team. What do you do? After all, there were no rules against it. This scenario wasn't hypothetical for many Tennessee students in the early 20th century. These problems would persist until 1925, when the creation of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association aimed to bring order to the mayhem.

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[Tullahoma's Olive recognized for Distinguished Service](#)

A veteran head coach who played collegiately at Carson-Newman, John Olive continues to serve as athletics director for Tullahoma City Schools – first starting as the high school's athletics director and then expanding to oversee all schools in the system.

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[Board of Control conducts first meeting of the 2025-26 school year](#)

The Board approved the 2025-26 budget and approved the addition of a staff position of Director of Officials Education and Services. Classification for girls flag football was set by the Board and changes were made to the postseason tennis format.

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[Help us put sportsmanship in the spotlight!](#)

Has something positive happened recently at a sporting event or school/community event in your area? This is your chance to help us recognize the people--administrators, coaches, parents, officials, or fans--that have done the right thing and gone out of their way to promote the values of integrity, sportsmanship and fair competition. Let us know about it!

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[Head coaches face new accountability measures under 2025-26 high school soccer rules](#)

High school soccer head coaches will face increased responsibility for sideline conduct under new rules that allow officials to warn, caution or eject coaches for misconduct committed by their bench personnel. The NFHS rules committee also revised Rule 7-2-4, which now states that only team captains may approach or speak to officials between periods unless beckoned by an official. Violations result in yellow cards for the offending individual.

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[NFHS Student-Athlete Award of Excellence continues to recognize stellar student-athletes](#)

In the 2024-2025 school year, the NFHS and TSSAA recognized 354 middle school and high school student athletes for demonstrating exceptional character and sportsmanship in their athletic pursuits. This was an increase from the inaugural year of 302 student athletes. Thank you to all coaches and athletic directors for taking time to nominate your students making a difference in your school and community! Please begin nominating your students for 2025-26 today!

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[Eight football rule changes approved for 2025, four focus on player equipment](#)

The National Federation of State High School Associations approved eight rule changes for high school football, with four addressing player equipment modifications that will take effect over the next three seasons.

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[TBR's Warranty Program secures your technical education investment](#)

The TBR - College System of Tennessee (TBR) Warranty Program is a guarantee for students pursuing technical education at Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) or any of the 13 community colleges within the TBR system. This unique initiative ensures that graduates from technical programs offering Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees, diplomas, or certificates possess the skills and competencies needed for success in their chosen fields. If a graduate cannot perform one or more key competencies identified for their program, they are eligible for one-time retraining at no cost within one year of graduation. This warranty supports students, employers, and the workforce by emphasizing quality education and reliable job readiness.

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[Volleyball rules eliminates controversial multiple contact penalty in 2025-26](#)

High school volleyball officials will no longer penalize players for multiple contacts on second touches when attempting to play the ball, eliminating one of the sport's most disputed judgment calls under rule changes approved for the 2025-26 season. Under the new Rule 9-4-8c, multiple contacts by one player will be allowed on second contact if the next contact comes from a teammate on the same side of the net. The rule already permitted multiple contacts on a team's first touch and after blocking.

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Call for Submissions

We want to include your thoughts in the monthly TSSAA Newsletter! Do you have 50-500 words to share on the topic of **teaching perseverance as part of educational athletics**? We welcome submissions from principals, athletic administrators, coaches and students! Consider sharing your thoughts, essays or even poems for an upcoming issue. Please send submissions in Microsoft Word format to mgillespie@tssaa.org.

TSSAA continues its support of the **National SAT/ACT Prep Project** through the NFHS and eKnowledge which allows any Tennessee student to receive a 95% discount on SAT or ACT prep courses. This is a community-service, non-profit project and all student fees are reinvested to improve the program and reach more families. The project has more than 45,000 five-star reviews and has already assisted nearly 300,000 families. Learn more at <https://eknowledge.com/TSSAA>.



Grove High School, Paris,

Tennessee before the Secondary School Athletic Association

August 26, 2025

Imagine you're a high schooler in 1920, traveling with your friends from school to play football against a team the next county over. You're excited, that is, until you arrive to find your opponent appears to have three stout, 25-year-old coal miners on their team. What do you do? After all, there were no rules against it.

This scenario wasn't hypothetical for many Tennessee students in the early 20th century. The chaotic world of unregulated high school athletics created situations that seem absurd today—grown men competing against teenagers, players switching teams between games, and coaches recruiting athletes from outside of school. These problems would persist until 1925, when the creation of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association aimed to bring order to the mayhem.

The Educational Landscape

To understand why such chaos existed, we must first examine Tennessee's educational infrastructure at the turn of the century. Public education remained a nascent concept. Few state-supported high schools existed, and attendance wasn't mandatory. Most Tennesseans lived in rural communities where educational opportunities were scarce, often limited to small schools with one or two teachers paid directly by parents.

This sparse infrastructure naturally meant organized sports barely existed. Yet change was coming. In 1909, the state legislature began earmarking funds for education, triggering a slow but steady transformation. County high schools emerged. Teacher training improved. The University of Tennessee received more considerable state support. As schools became more organized, student activities—including sports—followed suit.

The growth, however, largely occurred without leadership or oversight. This vacuum created fertile ground for the problems that would eventually demand a governing body for athletics.

Competition Without Rules

The absence of central authority meant each school team operated independently. Some created their own rules. Many had none at all. The result was predictable: eligibility standards varied wildly, age limits were non-existent, and players sometimes suited up for multiple schools in the same season.

Coaches, driven to win at any cost, embraced questionable tactics. They recruited from pool halls and street corners. They offered under-the-table payments and "gifts" of equipment. They compensated players for travel expenses. These tactics not only created competitive imbalances but also undermined the educational mission of schools themselves.

The concept of high school sports being exclusively for high school students—something we take for granted today—simply didn't exist. Teams of actual students regularly faced squads with no age or enrollment restrictions. This diminished both the value of competition and the integrity of the sport.

The College Shadow

As college sports gained popularity and prestige, high school programs felt pressure to emulate their practices. Unfortunately, this often meant adopting the same problematic behaviors: recruiting athletes from far-flung areas, offering improper inducements, and prioritizing athletic achievement over academic progress.

The situation created a peculiar hypocrisy. Coaches and boosters would decry recruiting violations when used against them, while simultaneously engaging in the tactics themselves. Everyone wanted a level playing field—so long as it tilted in their favor.

Early Reform Efforts

Not everyone accepted this chaos as inevitable. Forward-thinking principals recognized that sports, properly directed, could incentivize academic achievement and build character. These educators understood that strong leadership was essential to holding coaches accountable and to align sports programs with educational goals.

Regional organizations began emerging to address the problems. The Middle Tennessee High School Athletic Association represented one such effort. Individual tournaments implemented their own regulations. Blinkey Horn, sports editor of *The Nashville Tennessean*, enforced strict eligibility rules for entrants in his prestigious Tennessean-Vanderbilt basketball tournament.

These isolated initiatives, though admirable, highlighted a fundamental limitation: they only affected participating schools during specific events. The broader landscape remained unchanged. Schools competing outside these tournaments continued operating in the wild west of unregulated competition.

The Breaking Point

By the early 1920s, the situation had become untenable. The competitive gap between schools following rules and those ignoring them widened dramatically. Academic integrity concerns mounted. Parents grew frustrated watching their children compete against adults. School administrators faced increasing pressure to either join the arms race of recruiting or accept perpetual defeat.

The hypocrisy had become too blatant to ignore. Schools needed protection from each other—and from themselves.

The Birth of Order

In 1925, a group of principals decided enough was enough. Led by G.C. Carney of Nashville Central High School and A.J. Smith, superintendent of the Clarksville School System, they spearheaded the creation of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association.

These men had witnessed the participation of non-students firsthand. They'd seen the lack of consistent eligibility standards destroy competitive balance. They understood that individual schools were powerless to effect meaningful change. Only collective, cooperative action could restore integrity to high school athletics.

The TSSAA's formation represented more than bureaucratic problem-solving. It reflected a desire for purpose-driven sports. The organization's founders believed athletic participation should develop character, teach teamwork, and guide students towards excellence—values often obscured in the win-at-all-costs environment of unregulated competition.

A New Era Begins

The establishment of the TSSAA marked a watershed moment in Tennessee education. For the first time, high school athletics would operate under uniform standards. Age limits would be enforced. Academic requirements would matter. Recruiting violations would carry consequences.

The organization ensured sports would complement, rather than compromise, the educational mission of schools. It recognized that the true value of high school athletics lay not in championships but in shaping well-rounded individuals prepared for success beyond the playing field.

Over-age players and those not enrolled in school would have to find another team. With TSSAA established and dozens of schools joining each year, high school sports would finally be for high school students.

The TSSAA's founding didn't solve every problem overnight. Enforcement would prove challenging. Some who held sports above education would resist. New issues would emerge as sports evolved. But Tennessee had taken a crucial step toward ensuring that athletics served the best interests of students and schools. The era of anything-goes competition had ended. The age of organized, educational athletics had begun.

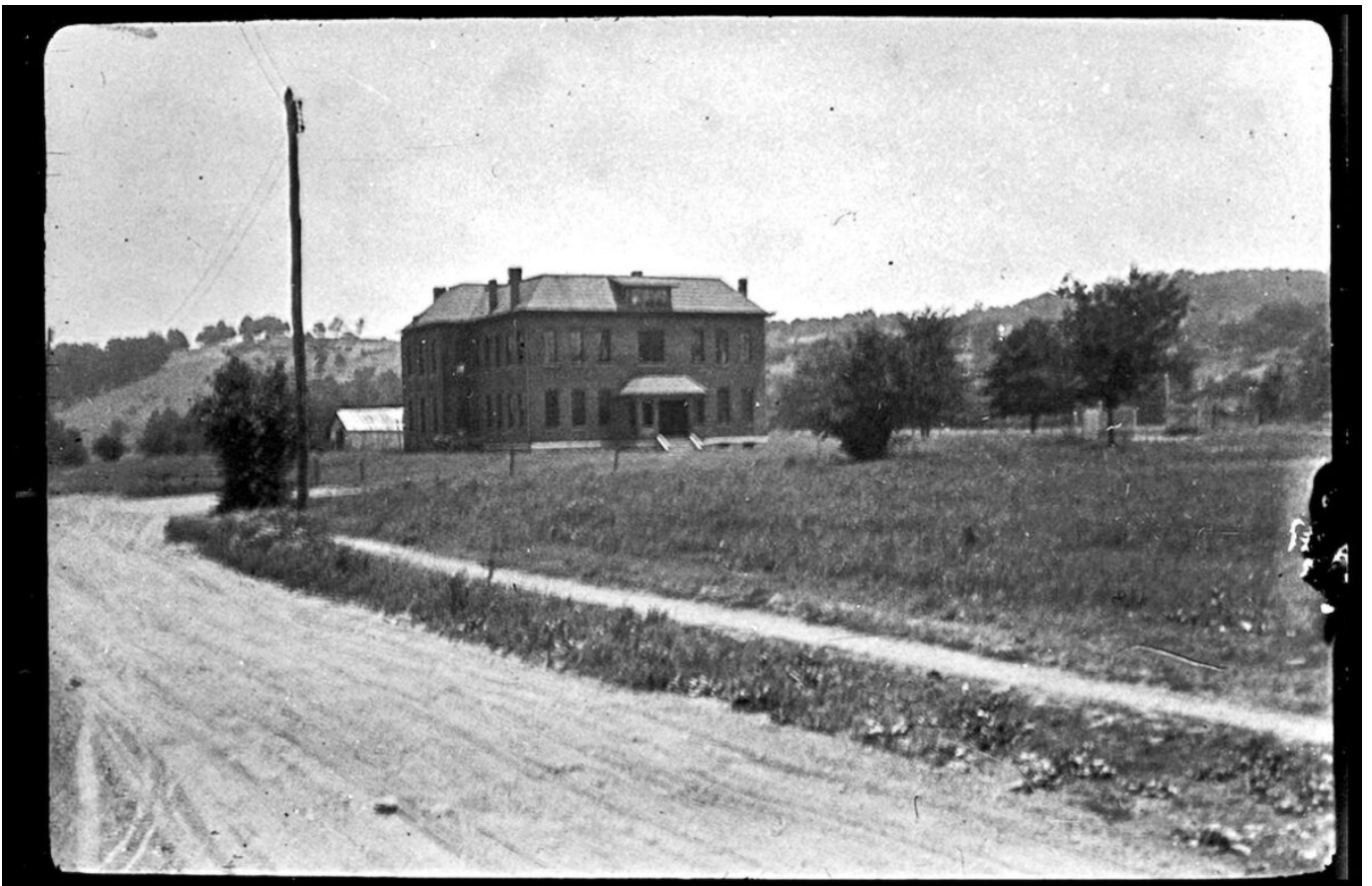


Wheat High School (TSSAA Charter Member)





Peabody Demonstration School (TSSAA Charter Member) 1925



Dayton Rhea County High School, 1925 (TSSAA Charter Member)



Cheatham County High School (TSSAA Charter Member) - 1927 Girls' Basketball Team



Grove High School, Paris,

Grove High School, Paris (TSSAA Charter Member)

AUTHOR
Bradley Lambert



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

Sports News

General News

Tullahoma's Olive recognized for Distinguished Service

Former football coach and current Athletic Director honored for four decades of service

August 26, 2025

Check the margins.

There, John Olive is diagramming his future.

Sure, it's X's and O's, but the charted course is undeniable.

He will become a football coach. He will become a public educator. He will devote decades of his life to helping educate and mentor young people.

Olive will win more than 225 games as a Tennessee high school football head coach, culminating his run with a TSSAA State Championship. He will log more than four decades' public service.

And, in 2025, he will be named the first TSSAA Distinguished Service Award winner for the 2025-26 academic year.

"I really thought I wanted to be the next Bear Bryant," Olive said, hearkening to the legendary Alabama, Kentucky and Texas A&M coach who won national championships and garnered College Football Hall of Fame enshrinement. "My high school at that time, Maryville High, had very close connections to the Alabama coaching staff. They ran wishbone, we ran wishbone.

"There were a lot of close connections there; my high school staff would go down to every spring Alabama practice and clinic with them, trying to add in anything they added in. The wishbone was the hit offense of that time period and when I went back to clean out things at my parents' house, I found a box of notebooks. Notes from science classes or U.S. History, but what you would see written in the margins, on top of the pages, will be Xs and Os. Everything in there was me trying to design a defense to stop the wishbone."

A veteran head coach with stints atop his alma mater, Maryville, as well as a state championship tenure at Tullahoma, Olive – who played collegiately at Carson-Newman, where he also initiated his coaching career -- continues to serve as athletics director for Tullahoma City Schools – first starting as the high school's athletics director and then expanding to oversee all schools in the system.



John Olive

“I guess I still enjoy getting up every day, going to work and seeing young people,” said Olive, the son of a preacher who married the daughter of a preacher, Cherie. “I work primarily with coaches, but my office is located within the high school. I’m still around the young people.

“Someday I know I’ve gotta give it up and walk away from it, but I still feel good and still feel like we’re helping in making progress. We’re a member of A Better Way Athletics, and the progress we’ve made with our high school coaches through A Better Way Athletics, I’ve watched our coaches really mature and become so much better at how to handle students, how to handle parents, even how to handle communication with each other.”

After stepping away from his football duties following the 2021 TSSAA State Championship, Olive also relishes seeing Tullahoma’s broad athletics success.

Boys’ basketball and baseball have been major factors in state championships, and girls’ bowling also has been elite. It’s a fitting sunset for Olive, a 41-year coaching veteran with more than three decades’ work as a head coach.

TSSAA proudly salutes John Olive for his more than four decades of involvement in education-based athletics.

AUTHOR

John Brice



General News

Meeting Agendas/Minutes News

Board of Control conducts first meeting of the 2025-26 school year

Over 20 items discussed at August meeting

August 18, 2025

The TSSAA Board of Control met in Hermitage on Monday, August 18.

The Board approved the 2025-26 budget and voted to reallocate funds of the revenue surplus. A large portion of the surplus will go towards the construction of the new TSSAA office building. More than \$130,000 will be a rebate to each school for 2024-2025 Membership Dues, more than \$45,000 as a rebate to each school for 2024-2025 Golf Fees, and more than \$20,000 to help supply select schools WBGT and/or AEDs.

A proposal to change the Division I state volleyball tournament format to a single-elimination bracket with a consolation bracket was approved by the Board.

Changes proposed by the tennis committee were approved. The postseason format for tennis will change from a full 3rd set to 3rd set tiebreaker and the Division I, Class AA format to 3 doubles, 6 singles.

The Board approved the creation of a new position on the state office. The position of Director of Officials Education and Services will play a vital role in supporting the mission of the TSSAA by providing leadership, training, and oversight to the athletic officials across all sanctioned sports. This individual is responsible for the recruitment, education, evaluation, and retention of officials throughout the state.

Numerous spring sport championship locations that were not decided at the June Board of Control meeting were selected. The boys and girls lacrosse championships will be held at two Williamson County schools and the girls flag football championships will be held at Richard Siegel Soccer Complex in Murfreesboro. The middle school baseball championships will be held at multiple locations in the Chattanooga area while the middle school softball championships will be held at Warner Park in Chattanooga.

Classification for girls flag football was set by the Board. There will be two classes (Class A and AA) and eight regions in each class. The Board also approved official's fees for girls flag football for the upcoming school year. The following officials' fees were approved with 3-person crews.

During the regular season and 4-person crews during the postseason.

- \$65 per official for a single varsity game
- \$55 per official per game if more than one varsity game at a site
- JV games left to negotiation between school and local officials' association

Fairview Christian Academy, Devout Academy, Maryville Christian School, and Nurses Middle College Nashville were all approved for membership in the association.

The full summary of the Board agenda is below.

1. Approved the Minutes from the previous meeting.
2. Approved the proposed budget for the 2025-26 school year.
3. Approved the allocation of excess revenue generated during the 2024-25 school year.
4. Approved the job description for TSSAA Director of Officials Services.
5. Approved Chattanooga for middle school baseball and softball, Williamson County for high school lacrosse.
6. Approved classification in girls' flag football for the 2025-26 and 2026-27 school years.
7. Approved officials' fees for girls' flag football.
8. Denied Glencliff High School's request to move back to Class AA, Region 6, District 11 from Class A, Region 5, District 9.
9. Denied Northview Academy's request for a change in wrestling classification.
10. Approved the co-op exception request from Valley Christian Academy and McMinn County High School.
11. Approved the adjustment to the TSSAA Sports Calendar for tennis.
12. Approved the tennis sports regulation recommendation.
13. Approved the recommended tournament format for tennis.
14. Approved proposed change for a single-elimination bracket and consolation bracket in the Division I Volleyball State Tournament.
15. Approved the requirement for registered TSSAA Officials as Line Judges for all Division I Sectional Matches and all Division II Quarterfinal Matches with a fee set at \$65 per official plus \$0.30 per mile round trip.
16. Approved the proposal for DII A and AA basketball, soccer, and volleyball game times.
17. Approved allowing DII A East/West basketball teams to find and play at alternative sites for all sports except football.
18. Approved membership for Fairview Christian Academy and co-op agreement with Meigs County.
19. Approved membership for Devout Academy.
20. Approved membership for Maryville Christian School.
21. Approved membership for Nurses Middle College Nashville.



Head coaches face new accountability measures under 2025-26 high school soccer rules

August 20, 2025

High school soccer head coaches will face increased responsibility for sideline conduct under new rules that allow officials to warn, caution or eject coaches for misconduct committed by their bench personnel.

The change highlighting head coach accountability is among six rules modifications approved by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Board of Directors following recommendations from the NFHS Soccer Rules Committee during its February meeting in Indianapolis.

"Head coaches have a high degree of responsibility for their team areas and bench behavior and are to be held accountable now that officials are allowed to warn, caution or eject head coaches for misconduct committed by bench personnel," said Gibby Reynolds, Soccer Rules Committee chair and Oregon School Activities Association administrator. "This change promotes a culture of respect and positive behavior on the sidelines."

The committee also restricted communication with officials during game breaks. Under revised Rule 7-2-4, only team captains may approach or speak to officials between periods unless beckoned by an official. Violations result in yellow cards for the offending individual.

Other changes include allowing team substitutions during temporary game suspensions, such as water breaks in hot weather. Rule 3-3-2 was modified to clarify that players must leave the field when beckoned by officials for injury evaluation, regardless of why the clock stopped.

Officials also clarified uniform numbering requirements, allowing required numbers to appear on jerseys, shorts or both under Rule 4-1-2.

The rules committee eliminated Rule 18, which contained definitions, integrating relevant terms into corresponding rule sections while removing outdated language.

"By integrating Rule 18's terms and definitions directly into their corresponding rule sections, we continue this effort – eliminating redundancy, resolving potential conflicts and ensuring consistency," said Julie Cochran, NFHS director of sports.

The complete rules changes are available at [NFHS.org](https://www.nfhs.org) under "Activities & Sports." The 2025-26 Soccer Rules Book is available for purchase at [NFHS.com](https://www.nfhs.com), with the digital version available in the NFHS Digital app. TSSAA head coaches receive free access to the digital rules book and are briefed annually on rules changes through mandatory rules clinics.

Soccer ranks as the fifth-most popular boys sport with 467,483 participants in 12,754 schools and third among girls with 383,895 participants at 12,307 schools, according to the most recent NFHS participation survey.

NFHS Student-Athlete Award of Excellence

The Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) together with the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) has established the NFHS Award of Excellence for Sportsmanship, Ethics & Integrity to honor remarkable student-athletes who have demonstrated exceptional character and sportsmanship in their athletic pursuits. Deserving students will be presented with a certificate from the Chief Executive of the NFHS, Karissa Neihoff, and the Executive Director of the TSSAA, Mark Reeves.

Leadership among both the staff and students within our schools is vitally important and is a significant tool in molding the future of our communities and nation. Leaders who show respect, integrity and good sportsmanship not only influence their peers but demonstrate values that extend beyond athletics. They contribute to a positive school environment and often become role models that inspire younger students to follow the path of good leadership.

Please use the form linked below to share a story about a student-athlete you know who has demonstrated exceptional sportsmanship, integrity, and ethics. If you have any questions about the award or the nomination process, please contact Courtney Brunetz (cbrunetz@tssaa.org).

We look forward to your submissions recognizing your outstanding student-athletes who embody good sportsmanship and ethical behavior and exude a spirit of fairness and respect.

[Online Nomination Form](#)



TSSAA and NFHS Logos

Past Winners
2024-25 Winners
2023-24 Winners



Eight football rule changes approved for 2025, four focus on player equipment

August 19, 2025

The National Federation of State High School Associations approved eight rule changes for high school football, with four addressing player equipment modifications that will take effect over the next three seasons.

The NFHS Football Rules Committee recommended the changes during its January meeting in Indianapolis. The NFHS Board of Directors subsequently approved all recommendations.

The most immediate change will allow limited electronic communication with players during games, though in-helmet communication remains prohibited. Rule 1-5-3c(2) will permit fixed electronic signs with play signals and other non-audio methods, but players between the numbers still cannot watch video.

Conversely, a new prohibition in Rule 1-5-3c(3) bans players from wearing any audio or video recording devices during games. No player may wear equipment that records or transmits audio or video while participating.

Future equipment changes include stricter requirements for tooth and mouth protectors beginning in 2026. The devices cannot include non-functional attachments or pose health risks to players.

Starting in 2027, arm sleeves must meet Sports and Fitness Industry Association specifications and display permanent SFIA seals. The SFIA developed the new standards in collaboration with manufacturers and the NFHS.

"One of our responsibilities is to properly respond to advancements in equipment and technology," said Steve Roberts, committee chair and associate executive director of the Arkansas Activities Association. "Through deliberate research, debate and input from the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee and engineers, we are confident the rule changes regarding equipment are a positive move for our game."

Other approved changes include a modification to Rule 4-3-1 regarding fumbles that go out of bounds. Forward fumbles between goal lines will now return to the fumble spot rather than where the ball crossed the sideline.

"The committee made the change because the previous rule potentially provided an unfair advantage to the fumbling team," said Bob Colgate, NFHS Football Rules Book editor.

The committee also deleted Rule 10-4-4b to ensure consistency in penalty enforcement, particularly for illegal participation fouls. Six-player football rules were revised to clarify advancement beyond the line of scrimmage following change of possession.

The Football Rules Committee includes representatives from each NFHS member state association using NFHS rules, plus delegates from the NFHS Coaches Association and Officials Association.

The complete rule changes are available at www.nfhs.org under "Activities & Sports" and "Football." The Football Rules Book is available for purchase at www.NFHS.com, with the digital version accessible through the NFHS Digital app. TSSAA head coaches receive free access to the digital rules book and are briefed annually on rules changes through mandatory rules clinics.

According to the 2023-24 NFHS participation survey, 11-player football remains the most popular high school sport for boys with 1,031,508 participants across 13,788 schools. Including other football variations and girls flag football, total participation reached 1,074,751 players nationwide.



Volleyball rules eliminates controversial multiple contact penalty in 2025-26

August 19, 2025

High school volleyball officials will no longer penalize players for multiple contacts on second touches when attempting to play the ball, eliminating one of the sport's most disputed judgment calls under rule changes approved for the 2025-26 season.

The National Federation of State High School Associations approved six volleyball rule changes at its January meeting, with the multiple contact revision highlighting the modifications designed to improve game flow and reduce conflicts between coaches and officials.

"The multiple contact fault has consistently been a point of contention between coaches and officials," said Lindsey Atkinson, NFHS director of sports and volleyball rules committee liaison. "The elimination of this fault will contribute to fewer disputes and ultimately benefit the overall environment of the match."

Under the new Rule 9-4-8c, multiple contacts by one player will be allowed on second contact if the next contact comes from a teammate on the same side of the net. The rule already permitted multiple contacts on a team's first touch and after blocking.

Uniform requirements were modified to simplify number placement and undergarment rules. Starting in 2029, jersey numbers must only be centered on the upper half of uniforms, eliminating the current 5-inch measurement requirement from top and bottom edges.

Players may now wear solid black, white or gray undergarments when team uniform colors cannot be matched, though all non-libero players must wear the same undergarment color.

Officials will no longer be required to carry lineup cards, though newer referees may continue using them as training tools. The change affects Rules 5-3-2b and 5-5-3b(9).

Penalties for illegal libero replacements will now depend on timing relative to serve contact. Violations identified before service contact result in unnecessary delay warnings, while those caught afterward become illegal alignment penalties with loss of rally and point.

The 2025-26 volleyball rules book will be available in print in late April at www.NFHS.com, with digital versions available through the NFHS Digital app. TSSAA head coaches receive free access to the digital rules book and are briefed annually on rules changes through mandatory rules clinics.

Volleyball ranks as the second-most popular girls sport with 479,125 participants at 16,849 schools nationwide, trailing only track and field. Boys volleyball includes 85,255 participants at 3,805 schools.