



NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2025

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[Tennessee's Community Colleges launch new TBR General Education Core](#)

When Tennessee's community colleges opened the 2025-26 academic year in August, they launched the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) General Education Core, a transformative experience designed to equip students with the essential skills and knowledge for success in the 21st Century. The General Education Core equips students with the ability to think critically and adapt to new challenges. Whether it's analyzing data, understanding cultural contexts, or communicating effectively, the skills gained through Core courses are transferable across multiple careers and industries.

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[High school basketball rules changes target goaltending, basket interference](#)

The NFHS Basketball Rules Committee recommended six changes during its April meeting in Indianapolis. The most significant change establishes that a ball is considered on its downward flight once it contacts the backboard on a legitimate shot attempt, making it goaltending if a defensive player touches the ball afterward. Previously, officials had to determine subjectively whether a shot was still ascending before calling goaltending.

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[From the Desk of Mark Reeves](#)

The TSSAA is proud to welcome back the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) as a valued partner of our Association. TBR - The College System of Tennessee, the state's largest public higher education system, includes more than 175 community colleges and colleges of applied technology teaching locations across the state. Over the past five years, TBR colleges have served more than 500,000 students, offering over 640 programs of study designed to meet the needs of Tennessee's workforce.

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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>.



The Early Years: An Association of Purpose and Cooperation

September 30, 2025

In the spring of 1925, thirty educators gathered in a classroom at Nashville's Hume-Fogg High School with a clear diagnosis: interscholastic athletics was untethered from educational purpose and change was necessary. "Student-athletes" often weren't legitimate students, eligibility standards varied wildly between schools, and officiating lacked consistency. These principals and superintendents believed athletics could enhance education as part of the overall school program—but only if educators themselves controlled the boundaries.

A small but dedicated group of these school leaders established the TSSAA with a straightforward mission: ensure athletics served the school, not the reverse. This principle would guide Tennessee school athletics for the next hundred years, withstanding countless pressures from those who would use athletics as a vehicle for self-aggrandizement rather than as an educational tool maintained for the good of all.

The First Meeting

The initial meeting was led by G. C. Carney, the principal of Nashville Central High School, and A. J. Smith, the superintendent of the Clarksville School System. Drafting a basic agreement amongst themselves, they gave their work a name—Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association.

By the time they adjourned, Carney was president, Smith secretary-treasurer, and the first Board of Control had been elected, with vice presidents from each Grand Division—James Lovell (Bradley Central High School), Frank A. Faulkinberry (Franklin County High School), and B. L. Hassell (Peabody High School, Trenton) with two additional members appointed in Stacy E. Nelson (Chattanooga Central High School) and W. A. Bass (state high school supervisor).

They borrowed no authority except the moral kind that comes from running schools every day.

Twenty-four schools filed applications at once; forty-five were members by the end of the first year. The dues were five dollars. The idea was larger than the fee.

The Association's declared purpose was "to stimulate and regulate the athletic relations of the secondary schools of Tennessee," public and private. The word "relations" carried great weight and meaning: games were often hotly contested, but schools, as institutions, had to live together after every buzzer, and they needed predictable ways to do it.

The architecture of the new Association followed those Grand Divisions. By 1930, the Board of Control had expanded to a full nine-members, three from each Division, and was the executive arm and final court of appeals for the organization. By rule, they were principals or superintendents, and the three from each Division functioned as a Divisional Committee, empowered to organize locally and rule on matters in their region, subject to appeal to the full Board. The officers—a President and a Secretary-Treasurer—were elected by the Board, and the Association would hold its annual meeting during the State Teachers' Association Conference in Nashville. A quorum was twenty member schools and five Board members.

Rulemaking Matures

In these early years, changes to the Constitution and Bylaws were made by direct votes of the principals. Changes required a two-thirds majority. It was messy—the hallmark of a pure democracy—and became unwieldy as the membership grew.

The first procedure was to vote during the annual meeting, but the membership soon realized that the growing size of the group and the lack of preparation and prior contemplation contributed to hasty rule changes which were oftentimes unwise and soon reversed.

Before long, the Association moved to changes by referendum. By 1934, however, TSSAA's Secretary F. S. Elliott reported that the referendum-by-mail program was an expensive undertaking and that the rate of response was declining with each passing year.

The Association took a step forward at the annual meeting in 1935. Borrowing a model other states had found effective, the membership created a Legislative Council, with one member per Congressional District (nine at the time), to specialize in lawmaking. The Board of Control retained its judicial and executive roles—enforcement, appeals, expenditures, registration of officials—while the Council handled the Constitution and Bylaws. The two bodies were firewalled: no one could serve on both. Proposals would flow up from schools through three regional meetings (East, Middle, West) each fall; the Council would gauge sentiment and vote in its annual spring meeting.

Less a Foundation, More a Reason for Existence

The Association is a pact to avoid a “prisoner’s dilemma.” Everyone has an incentive to cheat. Winning is everyone’s goal. But if everyone cheats, and the cheating inevitably escalates, the result is the destruction of what makes school sports worth having in the first place.

The 1930 handbook—printed, stapled, and mailed to every member school—contained only five basic eligibility rules, but they stand at the heart of the purpose of TSSAA.

- **Scholarship:** A student had to pass three full-unit subjects the previous term and be passing three in the current term. A “pass” was 75 percent, and summer-school makeup work did not count.
- **Term Limit:** Ten terms of attendance (or fifteen three-month terms) was the lifetime maximum. One play in one varsity game burned an entire season.
- **Age Limit:** No student could compete after his twenty-first birthday.
- **Transfer (Migratory) Rule:** A student who changed schools without a corresponding change in his parents’ residence sat out twelve months in that sport.
- **Amateurism & Rewards:** No pay for play, no gifts worth more than one dollar, and no officiating for money. Medals, cups, and school letters were allowed; everything else was suspect.

Each rule is a credible commitment by individual schools to restrain *short-term* advantages so that *together* the schools may preserve educational competition over the *long-term*.

Students must actually be students. Players must be of school age and therefore get a limited time to play. And you play for the team where you go to school.

If talent can be legally aggregated wherever it wishes on short notice, you no longer have school teams but regional all-star clubs in school uniforms. If sport becomes a cash market, the educational frame is displaced by recruitment, sponsorship, and bidding.

You can renovate the kitchen or add a deck, but mess with the foundation of a house and the whole thing may easily collapse.

Responsive Rule Making

Some rules have come and gone over the years, in response to changing circumstances. Of note during the period between 1925 and 1942:

- **Playing on Teams in Higher Institutions:** Adopted in 1931, the rule stated that no person was eligible who had ever attended college or played on a normal school, junior college, college, or university team. An exception for students whose scholarship only allowed entry into classes not beyond the senior year of preparatory schools was initially made, but removed in 1936.
- **Student Dropped from School:** A student who dropped out before the end of a term was ineligible until they had been back in school a full term and passed in three subjects.

- **Student Service:** From 1931, a student holding a position such as librarian, monitor, secretary, janitor, or waiter (or any other position for which they received financial consideration) was ineligible unless the Divisional Committee decided the service rendered was adequate return for the concession.
- **Tuition:** If tuition was charged, it was presumed to be paid by someone concerned with the student's welfare. The 1931 rule stated that scholarships granted by school authorities should be based on adequate grounds, and outside payments for athletic interest were viewed with suspicion. Divisional Committees could request information for eligibility protests. Ministerial students and sons of ministers receiving free tuition were exempt. In 1936 the rule narrowed to require tuition be paid by a parent or bona fide guardian, and scholarships could not be granted for athletic purposes (their basis had to be approved by the Divisional Board).
- **Teams Which Member Schools May Play:** Initially, TSSAA schools were permitted to play alumni and freshman college and junior college teams. After January 1, 1931, playing non-TSSAA schools in Tennessee or schools outside Tennessee not part of their state's athletic association was prohibited. In 1935, the rule was relaxed to also allow contests with members of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. The Southern Association clause was scheduled for elimination in 1941 but was reinstated in 1942. An exception for one alumni game and games against college freshmen persisted through the period.

Other rules we have come to know today were added during this period.

- **Time of Enrollment (or Enrollment Rule):** A student had to be duly enrolled by the twentieth day after the beginning of the term to participate in sports that term.
- **Recruiting Rule:** Introduced in 1936, the rule stipulated that the use of "undue influence" to cause a student to transfer for athletic purposes would render the student ineligible for twelve months and penalize the school.
- **Eligibility Lists:** Initially, team managers were required to mail a principal-certified statement of eligibility to the opposing team five days before each contest. Principals had to furnish eligibility information upon request or risk being removed from membership. Beginning in 1936, eligibility lists for each sport, containing the names of all participating students, had to be filed with the Divisional Secretary and State Secretary-Treasurer before the first game. Students joining the team late had to likewise be reported before a student participated, with a penalty of sixty days' suspension for violations. By 1939, failing to return participation lists, rating sheets, or other requested blanks also carried this penalty.

The two decades following 1925 were a time of dynamic evolution for TSSAA, as the membership adapted the rules to close loopholes and address new challenges. The early set of rules defined the organization's very identity.

Together, the school leaders worked to construct a defensive wall around the school day, the school year, and the principal's authority. With rules focused on academic progress, age limits, transfers, and amateurism, the bylaws established a sound philosophical core, ensuring that athletics remained a component of education, not a professional enterprise.

Rules to Live By

The handful of principals who first drew up the TSSAA constitution understood something crucial: competition is only meaningful within agreed-upon limits. Remove the limits, and you don't get better competition - you get chaos where the strongest players write their own rules and everyone else goes home.

These weren't just rules about sports - they were rules about how to live together. Schools are neighbors. They have to schedule each other, accept referees' calls, honor results, and do it all again next season. That only works if everyone believes the game is fair and worth playing.

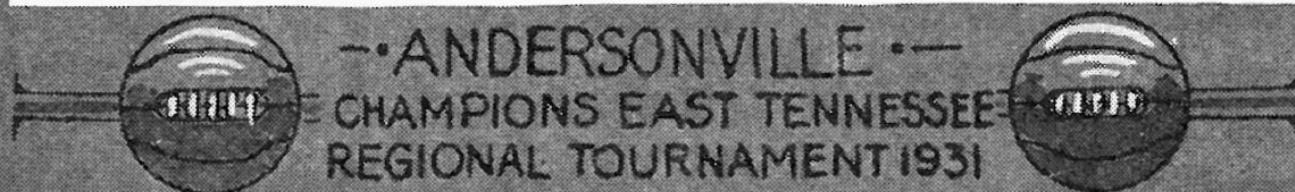
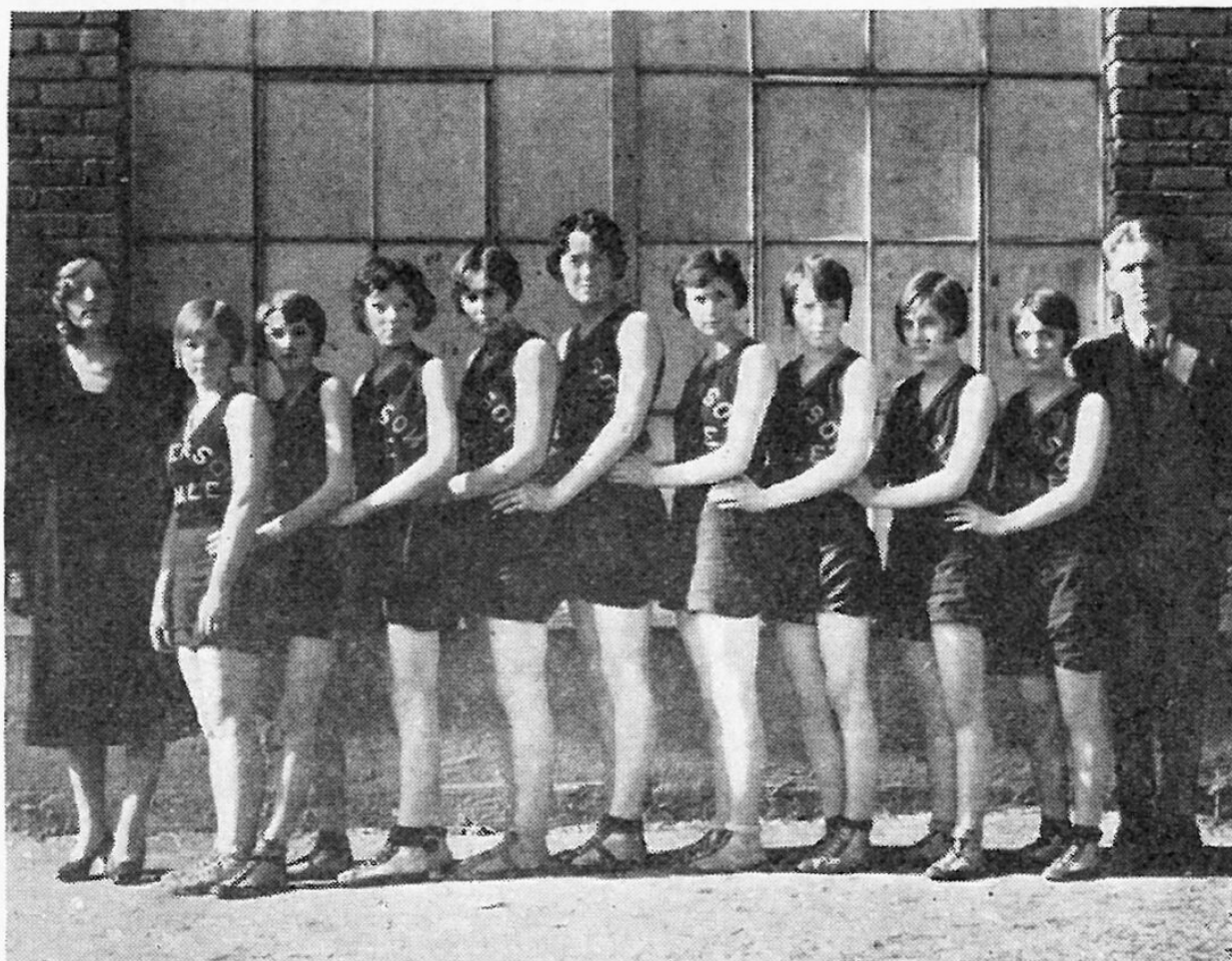
Break that trust, and you don't just lose a sports association - you lose the idea that institutions can cooperate for something bigger than themselves.

Against all odds, the Association they built remains what they intended: a non-profit confederation, not tax-supported, funded by the gate receipts of the postseason and the help of corporate sponsors, led by school administrators, and bounded by written rules.

Every policy answers, "How does this serve schooling?" If the answer is "it serves winning," it is a violation of the association's ethos. It is not anti-sport; it is radically pro-school.

Properly functioning, the Association is an impediment to those who believe a successful sports season is the secret to success in life, and not an education, honestly earned.

While today's culture may reward glare and reaction, TSSAA's work remains as clear and necessary as ever: process over noise. Meetings on the calendar, proposals in writing, votes tabulated, officials registered, eligibility lists filed, sanctions issued, and, as always, with the name of a principal at the bottom of the page.



1931 East Tennessee Girls Basketball Champions - Andersonville

Documents

[1930 Handbook \(PDF\)](#)

Early Evolution of Transfer Rules (Migratory Rules)

- 1930-1931: A student transferring schools was barred from competition for twelve calendar months in the sport they had participated in, unless the transfer was due to a change in parental or guardian residence or completion of studies at the former school. Specific exceptions were made for students completing certain grades or transferring from two-year to four-year high schools. Students were required to live at home with parents/guardians if they participated in athletics, and bus route changes did not affect eligibility.
- 1935: The rules were codified under "Transfer Rules," maintaining the twelve-month ineligibility for transfers without a corresponding change in parental residence. Exceptions were added for out-of-state transfers to private TSSAA schools. Athletes were required to live at home with parents or appointed guardians (with Divisional Board exceptions possible, and private school students supervised by faculty exempt). Students completing studies could transfer, and two-year high school students could transfer to higher-grade schools after one year.
- 1936: New provisions made students eligible if they transferred from schools that lost their State Department of Education rating. Also, students whose school residence changed due to bona fide bus route changes by the County Board of Education or Superintendent did not forfeit eligibility within their own county. Students ineligible in another state automatically became ineligible in Tennessee.

- 1937: The "within their own county" restriction for bus route changes was removed. A rule was added that students living in one county and attending school in another were ineligible unless the resident county's Board of Education contracted with the other county and paid tuition.
- 1938: The cross-county tuition rule from 1937 was removed. The bus route change rule continued without the "within their own county" limitation.
- 1939: A major change made a student, with or without an athletic record, ineligible for twelve months in all sports (previously "that sport") if they transferred without a corresponding change in parental or guardian residence on or after October 1, 1939.
- 1940: Further clarification stated that if a transfer was due to a change in parental/guardian residence, the student would be ineligible until the Divisional Board of Control reviewed the case and declared them eligible.
- 1941: The ability for the Divisional Board of Control to make exceptions for "manifest injustice" regarding athletes living at home with parents/guardians was removed.
- 1942: This rule removed in 1941 was re-added, allowing the Divisional Board of Control to make exceptions for "manifest injustice" regarding athletes living at home, but only "after the student has been in school twelve months from date of entry".

AUTHOR

Bradley Lambert



Brothers' act of compassion earns state sportsmanship recognition

September 30, 2025

During a Friday night football game earlier this season between Warren County High School and Franklin County High School, two brothers demonstrated what coaches mean when they talk about character on the field.

Kristopher and Isaiah Robledo, wearing jerseys #4 and #8 respectively, noticed a Franklin County player injured on the field. Rather than using the stoppage as a chance to catch their breath, the brothers helped the opposing player to his feet and carried him to his sideline.

The act has earned both students the NFHS Student-Athlete Award of Excellence, presented by the TSSAA and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

According to their coach, both Kristopher and Isaiah play nearly every down for Warren County and are among the team's top players. The moment when they could have rested became an opportunity to help someone who needed it.

This kind of action matters because it reminds us what school athletics are supposed to teach. Competition is important, but recognizing the humanity of the person across the line of scrimmage is more important. When students see their peers choosing compassion over convenience, it sets a standard for behavior both on and off the field.

The Robledos didn't wait for someone else to help. They didn't calculate whether it would benefit them. They simply saw someone who needed assistance and provided it.

That's the example worth following—not because it wins awards, but because it reflects the kind of community we want to build through school sports. When young athletes understand that their opponents are not enemies but fellow students engaged in the same challenging activity, everyone benefits.

Nominate a student in your school today! 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).



Robledo Brothers

[More about Student-Athlete Award of Excellence](#)



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

Sports News

Officiating News

Longtime soccer official recognized for Distinguished Service

Al Overton has served as an official, assignor, and supervisor for soccer for multiple decades

September 29, 2025

Baseball. Football.

Soccer?

Soccer was, and remains, the outlier.

Yet some three decades after first agreeing to help coach the youth soccer team of his son, Graham, Al Overton remains a fixture around and on the pitch.

“My soccer started when my son was in kindergarten, as a matter of fact for a few years I helped coach, and then as P.T. Barnum said, There’s a sucker born every day,” Overton joked. “Then, I had some guys come up to me when we lived in Mississippi and asked if I had ever thought about refereeing soccer and if I wanted to help out.

“That was in 1994, I got certified as a US Soccer Federation referee. Couple years later, while still living in Mississippi, I got certified to do high school. Then in 2002, while living in Murfreesboro, I got back into high school officiating.”

Since that time, Overton has filled myriad roles for the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association – from helping to officiate boys’ and girls’ soccer, to becoming an area assignor and supervisor to finally helping officiating assignments for the TSSAA State Championships.

For these duties and his decades of service, Overton has been selected as a 2025-26 TSSAA Distinguished Service Award recipient.

With no soccer background and unknowingly on the cusp of having dedicated more than three decades to the sport, Overton knows what he would tell himself now back in 1994 when it all began.



Al Overton

“It’s probably going to be an extremely satisfying journey, a long and varied journey but everything about it is tremendously satisfying,” said Overton, a Tennessee Tech alum. “I forget who said it, but if you find something you really enjoy in life, then you don’t have to call it a job. I get paid for what I do, but I still don’t look on it as a job.

“I’m semi-retired, but I work seven days a week. Between high school, club and college (soccer, where Overton also has officiated and risen to the role of assignor), it’s not a job.”

With rain inundating much of the Midstate area in recent weeks, Overton has been scrambling to find windows of playable weather coupled with the life challenges of juggling the different lives of referees who also have families and jobs.

“I get a tremendous amount of satisfaction when people tell me I would not do what you do. Just this week for instance, middle school playoffs are starting up, there’s been tremendous rain, and it’s been a real challenge to get games scheduled, rescheduled and to make adjustments.

“It’s like putting a giant puzzle together and you get that satisfaction when you finally do get those.”

Moments of satisfaction are what define his time assisting the TSSAA, Overton said.

“Highlights for me from the TSSAA standpoint always were for me back in the day when I had the opportunity to work State Championship week for the boys and for the girls. It was just always a real highlight when you’re selected to do those games.’

And, it’s been doing those games, making those assignments and being around a sport he’s grown to love with his family always supporting him, even if wife, Lisa, is nonplused by her sports-fanatic husband.

“My wife is very unique, everything I do is centered around sports somehow, some way; soccer, I play golf, watch baseball, she’s a widow every Saturday because I am a huge college football fan,” said Overton, who also noted the support of his daughter, Mary Beth, as well as his son. “But if she never went to a sporting event, she’d be happy.

“In the offseason when I’m around the house and driving her crazy, she’ll always ask, ‘When does soccer season start back up?’.”

TSSAA proudly salutes Al Overton for his many years of dedicated service as an official in the state of Tennessee.

AUTHOR

John Brice



High school basketball rules changes target goaltending, basket interference

August 19, 2025

Three rule changes addressing when goaltending and basket interference are called highlight six revisions to high school basketball rules for the 2025-26 season approved by the National Federation of State High School Associations Board of Directors.

The most significant change establishes that a ball is considered on its downward flight once it contacts the backboard on a legitimate shot attempt, making it goaltending if a defensive player touches the ball afterward. Previously, officials had to determine subjectively whether a shot was still ascending before calling goaltending.

"By establishing that a ball is considered to be on its downward flight upon contacting the backboard, this rule change introduces a clear and objective standard," said Monica Maxwell, NFHS director of sports and liaison to the Basketball Rules Committee. "It significantly reduces the need for officials to make subjective judgments regarding the trajectory of a shot."

The changes also eliminate offensive goaltending violations, specifying that only defensive players can commit goaltending. Any alteration of a shot attempt with contact to the basket or backboard by an offensive player will be considered basket interference.

Additionally, intentionally slapping or striking the backboard during a shot attempt will now result in basket interference rather than a technical foul, removing the element of intent from officials' decisions.

Other approved changes include treating all players as bench personnel during timeouts to ensure consistent enforcement of unsporting conduct penalties, and reducing the penalty for players who purposely delay returning to the court after being out of bounds from a technical foul to a violation.

"One of the points of emphasis this year will be bench decorum," said Billy Strickland, executive director of the Alaska School Activities Association and chair of the NFHS Basketball Rules Committee.

The NFHS Basketball Rules Committee recommended all six changes during its April meeting in Indianapolis.

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 most recent NFHS participation survey, basketball ranks as the third-most popular sport for boys with 536,668 participants in 18,587 schools, and fourth-most popular for girls with 367,284 participants at 18,090 schools.