LHSAA Cross-Country Memo

In an effort to bring the sport of cross-country into compliance with current LHSAA bylaws, we would like to identify a few misconceptions and highlight a few specific bylaws where we as a legitimate high school sport must conform. Cross-country in Louisiana has grown tremendously in recent years, however, it has not been given the necessary attention that it rightfully deserves to keep it on track for growth, competitiveness, and recognition.

One of the misconceptions in cross-country is that seniors are not allowed to compete on the “junior varsity” level. This is not true. There is no LHSAA bylaw which mandates registered 7th-12th graders to compete on a specific level in cross-country. Eligible 7th-12th graders that are selected for “varsity” AND “sub-varsity” in the LHSAA members only website by your athletic director or principal may compete on either level. A 7th grader may compete on “varsity” and a 12th grader may compete on “sub-varsity” provided that both levels of competition are selected for all of your eligible athletes. This misconception has helped lead to the creation of the “open race” so as to circumvent the language of junior varsity to allow these student-athletes to participate, which is unnecessary.

Another misconception is tied to these “open races.” Because the open race is an untimed and/or unscored race, it doesn’t count as a legitimate event and anyone may participate. This is also not true. ANY event that is hosted by an LHSAA member school and contains registered student-athletes is legitimate and requires all those student-athletes to adhere to the same eligibility requirements as designated by the LHSAA. Student-athletes designate as ineligible, unregistered student-athletes, unattached athletes, student-athletes from in-state schools that are not members of the LHSAA shall not be allowed to run in “open races” or any race against registered LHSAA student-athletes.

Cross-country falls under Sports Season rule 4.2.8 which allows legal participation with an independent team. This also causes some confusion and misconceptions. An independent team is any individual or group of student-athletes who represent a non-LHSAA school or entity that practices and competes in athletics. This waiver allows for registered student-athletes to participate with an independent team only against other independent teams in the same sport during the same season. It does not allow registered student-athletes to represent their LHSAA-school in in-state competition against independent teams or schools independent of the LHSAA. At no point should any registered student-athlete be competing “unattached” in a cross-country meet hosted by
an LHSAA member school against any independent team or school that is independent of the LHSAA.

LHSAA member schools with configurations that include a combination of 7th or 8th grade on the same campus and have teams competing in the same sport as the high school team are NOT considered independent teams if they are under the umbrella of the same principal. This is the reasoning that allows these unregistered 7th and 8th graders who compete in a middle school program against independent teams the ability to practice together with the high school student-athletes. However, if these 7th and 8th graders are registered with the LHSAA, then they are no longer eligible to compete with those middle school programs against any independent team or schools independent of the LHSAA. Once 7th and 8th graders are registered, they can only compete with or against other registered LHSAA athletes. 7th and 8th graders who are registered with the LHSAA could potentially compete on their middle school team and on a high school team in the same sport if their middle school team is composed of only registered LHSAA student-athletes and only competing against other LHSAA member schools with registered 7th and 8th graders. It is also necessary to note that under no circumstance should any K-6th grader at our member schools be participating in practice or competition in any LHSAA sanctioned sport at any level.

Thank you to all of you who have already restructured your cross-country meets to be compliant with our LHSAA bylaws. Before your first competition, please do your due diligence to ensure that your registered athletes are competing only against other registered athletes. Contact the meet host to ask about who is participating in their “open,” “junior high,” and “middle school” divisions, if not already stated on the entry form, before you allow your athletes to compete. Please reference the LHSAA bylaws on page 3 of this memo or don’t hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions regarding cross-country.

Happy Running,

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REFERENCE - LHSAA BYLAWS PERTAINING TO CROSS-COUNTRY:

**Athletic Contest Section 6**

6.2 IN-STATE COMPETITION

6.2.1 LHSAA schools shall be allowed to compete against only the following schools in interscholastic athletic scrimmages, jaunborees, invitational tournaments, and/or regular contests:

1. LHSAA member schools

2. Schools that have officially applied for membership in the LHSAA

6.2.2 All interscholastic contests played in Louisiana by member schools shall be conducted in accordance with LHSAA constitutional provisions, by-laws, and playing rules.

**Sports Season Section 4**

4.2 INDEPENDENT or NON-HIGH SCHOOL TEAMS

4.2.4 Once a student becomes a member of an LHSAA school team, he/she may not participate with an independent team or an organized exhibition group in that same sport. A student who is a member of an LHSAA school team may not practice with or play in a contest with an independent team in the same sport that the school team he represents is competing. Practicing with or playing on an independent team while a student is a member of the school team in that same sport shall be a violation of this rule. This rule shall be in effect for a student from the time he/she reports for the school team until the student is no longer a member of the school team for any reason, or until the team has completed its sports season including state playoffs, if applicable.

4.2.5 A student who is a member of an LHSAA school team shall not participate in any manner in an event, a meet or a contest as an unattached contestant against a high school team, a junior high school team, a collegiate team, a club team or other unattached individuals in that same sport. One individual shall constitute a team in indoor and outdoor track and field.

**Eligibility Section 1**

1.22 STUDENTS IN 7th and/or 8th GRADES - A member school shall not allow a student in the 7th and/or 8th grade to practice or play with any of its school teams at any level in any sport unless that grade is under the official jurisdiction of the principal of the member high school as recognized by the State Department of Education. Under no circumstances shall any student below grade 7 participate in any LHSAA sanctioned sport at any level (varsity or sub-varsity).

1.22.1 A student in 7th and/or 8th grade who participates on a high school team shall meet the same eligibility requirements as a high school student, excluding the scholastic rule.

1. Seventh (7th) grade students who qualify to participate in LHSAA sanctioned athletics shall be eligible for competition on high school athletic teams during the ensuing twelve (12th) consecutive semesters or terms of 90 days.

2. Eighth (8th) grade students who qualify to participate in LHSAA sanctioned athletics shall be eligible for competition on high school athletic teams during the ensuing ten (10) consecutive semesters or terms of 90 days.

3. Once a seventh (7th) and/or eighth (8th) grade student is registered and submitted on the Members’ Only website, the student shall have established eligibility at that member school and has made his/her school of first choice and shall not get another choice upon entering high school and a subsequent transfer to another member school without a corresponding bona fide move shall cause the student to become ineligible until he/she has been in attendance at the school for one calendar year. The school shall have on file a written statement signed by one or both parents that the above rule has been read and explained to them.