Guidelines for Team Placement

Team Placement is the responsibility of each, respective, MSSA League Coordinator. The MSSA Administrator has the authority to override the League Coordinator's decisions in this regard if the Administrator has reason to believe an error in placement may have occurred. The MSSA Administrator will discuss the matter with the respective League Coordinator before a final placement decision is made.

Purpose of MSSA

We must all remember that the purpose of the association is to provide middle school-aged players the opportunity to continue to play the game, *on a recreational level*. **The objective is to have fun**. While everyone wants to "win", that should not be the objective when considering team placement. As stated in the Association Rules, "As adults, it is our responsibility to instill a spirit of sportsmanship and fair play in our players and parents." That goal cannot be achieved if we knowingly place teams so they can compile a perfect record. The intent should be to create an atmosphere in which **everyone** can have fun and enjoy the game.

Divisions

MSSA is comprised of separate Girls and Co-Rec Divisions. The Girl's Division is comprised of teams with ONLY female players. The Co-Rec Division is comprised of teams that MAY have female players, although most Co-Rec teams are comprised of only male players.

Conferences

Conferences are established within each Division to schedule games among teams of similar levels of competence. The number of conferences is based on the total number of teams that have been declared for that particular season. The total number of teams participating is divided by the number 8 to determine the number of conferences. For example, if there are 40 teams in the Girls Division, 5 conferences would be established. Conferences would be identified from "A" through "E" with the "A" conference being the highest level of competitiveness.

Team Declarations

Unfortunately, Team Placement is not an exact science. One team may clearly be an "A" team, while it is not quite that simple for others. When declaring teams, League Coordinators are encouraged to use a two-digit identification system for what they believe is the appropriate conference for each team. For example: A/A, A/B, C/C, D/C, E/D, or whatever. The intent is to provide a means by which the League Coordinator can communicate the uncertainty in declaring a particular team. For example, Team Red was in the B Conference last season, but they lost 3 of their better players, so they may no longer be a "B" Conference team. The coordinator may choose to identify Team Red as a B/C team.

When declaring teams, League Coordinators should take several factors into account when considering team placement:

1. Technical and tactical development of the players.
2. Previous experience in MSSA.
3. Composition of the team, based on the following elements:

a) <u>Age/Grade Level</u> – Typically, teams with older players are placed in higher level Conferences. For example, a team comprised of all 8th graders should be considered for placement in the A Conference. Conversely, a team comprised of all 6th graders should be considered for placement in the "E" Conference. This is not to suggest that a team of 7th graders could not be as competent as a team of 8th graders. Rather, it is to recognize the disparity in the physical development of players in this age group. In other words, some kids physically mature more rapidly in their early teen years than others. Above all else, we want to keep the game **SAFE**.

   i.   Are the players in the 6th, 7th or 8th grade?

   ii.   Is the team comprised of a mix of players from different grades?

   iii.   What is the ratio of 6th graders/7th graders/8th graders?

b) <u>Gender</u> – This is obviously not a factor in the Girls Division. However, when declaring teams in the Co-Rec Division, the total number of girls on the team should be considered. This is not intended to minimize girls' technical or tactical abilities. As outlined above, it is to recognize the disparity in the physical development of players in this age group. Coordinators should recall the team will likely be playing teams comprised of all boys.

c) <u>Fall Season Results</u> – Team placement in the spring season should consider how the team did in the fall season. When doing so, composition of the team roster must also be considered. Are all of the same players back? Have more advanced players been added to the roster? Etc.

Regular Season Scheduling

When creating schedules for the regular season, the Association considers two factors:

1. Conference Placement – The first consideration in scheduling is to match teams within the same Conference. However, given the inexactitude of determining team placement, teams may also be paired with a team from the conference above, or below, the conference in which they have been placed. Another reason for doing this is to provide comparative data for team placement in the season-ending tournament.

2. Travel Time – When scheduling games, the Association attempts to minimize travel time, particularly for weeknight games. Frequently, weeknight games are scheduled for the purpose of pairing teams from different conferences, as described above, while at the same time minimizing travel time.

Application of these criteria is typically modified for "A" Conference teams for two reasons:

1. The Association tries to minimize the number of games between "A" Conference teams and lower conference teams. This can be a very limiting consideration when creating schedules, since there are generally very few teams that declare in the "A" Conference. This is particularly true in the Fall Season. As a result, "A" Conference schedules tend to have more "Home and Away" games with the teams within their conference.

2. Occasionally, the travel time between "A" Conference teams does not practically allow for weeknight games. When this situation occurs, to avoid excessive weeknight travel, the Association may schedule games as follows:

- Schedule double headers on the weekends.

- Schedule games at neutral sites, if possible.

Tournament Team Placement

The Association records the results of regular season games to determine team placement for the season-ending tournament. In other words, team placement for the tournament is based on regular season results, not the conference in which the team was scheduled during the regular season. This procedure, while not perfect, attempts to establish a more equitable competition than may have been achieved during the regular season, due to the uncertainty of team placement for the regular season. If it isn't obvious, it also provides the opportunity to place teams "where they belonged in the first place.", whether knowingly or not. The scheduling of games between teams from different conferences during the regular season provides valuable data in this regard. This practice also provides "hope" to those teams that were misplaced too high for the regular season.