



NFMSS National Middle School Sports Standards

A National Framework for Safe, Educational, Fair and Developmentally Appropriate Middle School Athletics

National Federation of Middle School Sports

Grades 6 through 8

www.nfmss.org

MIDDLE SCHOOL SPORTS MATTER TOO.

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Introduction

The National Federation of Middle School Sports created the NFMSS National Middle School Sports Standards to establish a comprehensive framework for the administration, safety, development and advancement of middle school athletics across the United States.

Middle school student athletes are in a unique stage of physical, emotional, social and academic development. Their athletic experience should not simply duplicate high school or college sports. It should be designed specifically around the developmental needs of students in Grades 6 through 8.

The NFMSS National Middle School Sports Standards are intended to provide schools, athletic directors, coaches, officials, parents, student athletes and communities with clear expectations for creating safe, positive, educational and competitive athletic environments.

These standards are built around the belief that:

Middle School Sports Matter Too.

Athletics at this level should contribute to the complete development of the student athlete by promoting education, health, leadership, discipline, teamwork, confidence, character and responsible competition.

PILLAR 1

Middle School Student Athlete Bill of Rights

Every middle school student athlete should have the right to participate in an athletic environment that promotes safety, dignity, education and personal development.

Every student athlete has the right to:

1. **A Safe Athletic Environment.** Student athletes should participate in practices and competitions where reasonable health and safety precautions are in place.
2. **Respect and Dignity.** Every student athlete should be treated with respect by coaches, officials, administrators, teammates, opponents, spectators and other participants.
3. **Education First.** Athletics should complement the educational mission of the school. Student athletes should never be encouraged to sacrifice their education for athletic participation.
4. **Qualified Leadership.** Student athletes deserve coaches and athletic leaders who understand the responsibilities associated with working with young people.
5. **Mental and Emotional Wellness.** No athlete should be subjected to humiliation, bullying, hazing, emotional abuse or unreasonable pressure.
6. **Appropriate Medical Attention.** Injuries and potential medical emergencies should be taken seriously. No student athlete should be pressured to participate while injured or medically unable to compete.
7. **Fair Opportunity.** Economic circumstances, race, gender, disability or community resources should not unnecessarily prevent young people from accessing athletic opportunities.
8. **Age Appropriate Competition.** Training, practices, schedules and competition should reflect the developmental needs of middle school students.
9. **Positive Recognition.** Student athletes should have opportunities to be appropriately recognized for athletic achievement, academic success, leadership, improvement and sportsmanship.

10. A Voice. Student athletes should be able to communicate concerns involving safety, bullying, inappropriate conduct or their athletic experience without fear of retaliation.

PILLAR 2

Health and Safety Standards

Student athlete health and safety must remain one of the highest priorities of middle school athletics.

NFMSS recommends that participating athletic programs maintain appropriate procedures addressing:

Emergency Action Plans

Schools should maintain written emergency procedures for athletic practices, contests and facilities.

Concussion Recognition and Response

Coaches and appropriate personnel should receive concussion awareness education. Any student showing possible concussion symptoms should be removed from participation and evaluated in accordance with applicable medical guidance and state law.

Sudden Cardiac Emergencies

Athletic programs should maintain emergency procedures addressing sudden cardiac arrest. Access to Automated External Defibrillators should be incorporated where reasonably available.

Heat Illness

Athletic programs should establish appropriate procedures involving:

- Heat acclimatization
- Hydration
- Practice modification
- Environmental conditions
- Emergency response

Injury Management

Student athletes should not be encouraged to hide injuries or continue competing when participation could jeopardize their health.

Return to Participation

Return to participation following significant injury should be consistent with applicable medical recommendations and legal requirements.

Equipment Safety

Schools should make reasonable efforts to ensure athletic equipment is appropriate, maintained and used correctly.

Facility Safety

Playing surfaces, practice areas and competition facilities should be routinely evaluated for potential hazards.

PILLAR 3

Coach Education Standards

Middle school coaches have responsibilities that extend far beyond winning games. Coaches are educators, mentors, leaders and role models.

NFMSS recommends coach education addressing:

- CPR and AED awareness
- First aid fundamentals
- Concussion recognition
- Heat illness prevention
- Emergency procedures
- Youth development
- Mental health awareness
- Sportsmanship
- Appropriate interaction with minors
- Bullying and hazing prevention
- Athlete protection
- Ethical coaching practices

Coaching Philosophy

Middle school coaches should prioritize:

Development before specialization.

Education before winning.

Safety before competition.

Character before trophies.

Winning is an important part of competitive athletics, but it should never become more important than the well being and development of children.

PILLAR 4

Officials Standards

Officials play an essential role in maintaining fairness, safety and integrity.

NFMSS officials should demonstrate:

- Knowledge of applicable playing rules
- Professional conduct
- Impartiality
- Respectful communication
- Awareness of athlete safety
- Appropriate interaction with minors

- Consistent enforcement of rules
- Commitment to continuing education

Officials should never tolerate conduct that threatens athlete safety or undermines the integrity of competition.

PILLAR 5

Academic and Eligibility Standards

NFMSS believes:

Student comes before athlete.

Middle school athletics should strengthen the educational experience.

Athletic programs should establish clear policies regarding:

- Academic eligibility
- School attendance
- Grade level eligibility
- Age eligibility
- Enrollment requirements
- Transfers
- Academic support
- Behavioral expectations

Schools should make reasonable efforts to assist struggling student athletes academically rather than viewing removal from athletics as the only intervention.

Athletics can be an important motivation for students to remain engaged in school.

PILLAR 6

Mental Health and Wellness Standards

Middle school students face academic, athletic, social and emotional pressures during a critical developmental period.

Athletic programs should help create environments where students feel supported.

NFMSS encourages:

- Mental health awareness education
- Positive communication
- Appropriate expectations
- Recognition of athlete burnout
- Prevention of bullying and hazing
- Access to trusted adults
- Responsible coaching behavior
- Healthy relationships with competition

- Support following injuries or athletic setbacks

No coach should use humiliation, fear or emotional abuse as a coaching strategy.

Student athletes should know that asking for help demonstrates strength, not weakness.

PILLAR 7

Sportsmanship and Conduct Standards

Competition should develop character rather than destroy it.

NFMSS expects student athletes, coaches and athletic personnel to demonstrate:

Respect. Integrity. Responsibility. Self Control. Accountability. Sportsmanship.

Prohibited or unacceptable conduct may include:

- Fighting
- Threats
- Harassment
- Hazing
- Discriminatory conduct
- Targeted verbal abuse
- Retaliation
- Deliberate attempts to injure another participant
- Serious unsportsmanlike behavior

Winning never excuses inappropriate conduct.

PILLAR 8

Championship and Competition Standards

NFMSS sanctioned competitions should be administered according to consistent principles of fairness, safety and competitive integrity.

Championship standards may address:

- Team eligibility
- Athlete eligibility
- Qualification requirements
- Competition schedules
- Tournament procedures
- Seeding
- Officials
- Medical and safety procedures
- Dispute resolution
- Sportsmanship

- Awards
- Championship conduct

State Championships

NFMSS supports structured State Championship competition for middle school teams as part of creating meaningful competitive opportunities for schools.

Championship participation should recognize both competitive achievement and adherence to applicable eligibility and conduct requirements.

PILLAR 9

Parent and Spectator Code of Conduct

Parents and spectators are essential members of the middle school sports community. Their behavior affects children, coaches, officials and the overall environment.

Parents and spectators should:

- Encourage student athletes positively
- Respect officials
- Respect coaches
- Respect opposing teams
- Avoid abusive or threatening language
- Refrain from entering competition areas without authorization
- Avoid confrontations with children
- Demonstrate good sportsmanship
- Use social media responsibly
- Remember that the participants are children

NFMSS supports appropriate consequences for serious spectator misconduct, including removal from athletic events when necessary.

PILLAR 10

Athlete Data, Privacy and Digital Protection Standards

Technology has transformed athletics. Middle school sports now include:

- Athlete profiles
- Statistics
- Rankings
- Photography
- Video
- Livestreaming
- Social media
- Artificial intelligence

- Data analytics
- Digital recognition

Because middle school athletes are minors, additional responsibility is required.

NFMSS supports responsible practices involving:

Personal Information

Only appropriate athlete information should be collected, displayed or distributed.

Parental Permission

Schools and organizations should obtain appropriate permissions where required for the use of athlete images, profiles or personal information.

Livestreaming and Video

Video involving minors should be handled responsibly and consistent with applicable school policies and laws.

Athlete Profiles

Digital profiles should emphasize athletic and academic achievement while minimizing unnecessary personal information.

Artificial Intelligence

AI should be used responsibly and should never replace appropriate adult judgment involving athlete health, safety, eligibility or disciplinary decisions.

Data Security

Organizations maintaining athlete information should take reasonable steps to protect that information from unauthorized access or misuse.

Digital Exploitation

The image, likeness or personal information of a middle school student athlete should never be used irresponsibly or in ways that compromise the safety or dignity of the child.

PILLAR 11

Athlete Development and Participation Standards

Middle school athletics should reflect the developmental needs of children.

NFMSS encourages athletic programs to support:

- Multi sport participation
- Appropriate training loads
- Adequate rest and recovery
- Skill development
- Age appropriate conditioning
- Healthy competition
- Reasonable schedules

- Opportunities for participation
- Long term athlete development

Avoiding Premature Specialization

Children should not feel pressured to specialize in one sport before they are developmentally ready. Participating in multiple sports can help young athletes develop a wider range of physical and social skills.

Development Over Exposure

Middle school athletics should focus primarily on developing the child rather than creating excessive recruiting pressure.

Recognition is valuable. Development is essential.

NFMSS Certification Framework

The National Middle School Sports Standards can serve as the foundation for future NFMSS certification programs.

Level I: NFMSS Standards Committed School

Schools publicly commit to implementing the core NFMSS standards.

Level II: NFMSS Certified Middle School Athletic Program

Schools demonstrate compliance with defined requirements involving:

- Athlete safety
- Coach education
- Emergency planning
- Student athlete protections
- Sportsmanship
- Parent conduct
- Academic expectations

Level III: NFMSS Seal of Excellence

The highest NFMSS recognition for middle school athletic programs demonstrating exceptional performance in:

- Safety
- Education
- Leadership
- Athlete development
- Sportsmanship
- Compliance
- Community engagement

Schools achieving this designation may display the NFMSS Seal of Excellence for Middle School Athletics.

NFMSS National Commitment

The National Federation of Middle School Sports believes that every young person deserves an athletic experience that helps prepare them for life.

Middle school athletics should develop more than athletes. It should develop:

Students. Leaders. Teammates. Responsible citizens. Healthy young people. Future adults.

The purpose of the NFMSS National Middle School Sports Standards is to provide schools across America with a common framework for protecting children, strengthening athletic programs and elevating the importance of middle school sports.

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