



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

NEWS RELEASE

Religious Headwear Permitted Without State Association Approval in High School Soccer

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Theresia Wynns

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (February 28, 2021) — Religious headwear will now be permitted without state association approval in high school soccer, effective with the 2021-22 season.

This change in Rule 4-2 of the NFHS Soccer Rules Book was recommended by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Soccer Rules Committee at its January 18-20 meeting, which was held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The two recommended revisions to Rule 4 were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

Acting on an earlier recommendation to all sports rules committee by the Board of Directors, the Soccer Rules Committee adopted the following new language for Rule 4-2-10: “Head coverings worn for religious reasons shall not be made of abrasive or hard material and must fit securely.”

Theresia Wynns, NFHS director of sports and officials and liaison to the Soccer Rules Committee, said the new rule will allow student-athletes to express their religious beliefs through the wearing of headwear without the approval of the respective state association.

Language regarding religious headwear was deleted from Rule 4-2-11, which now refers solely to head coverings for medical or cosmetic reasons. Head coverings for these usages still require a physician's statement before a state association can grant approval.

With many states that play soccer in the fall affected by the pandemic, there were fewer rules proposals this year, so the committee turned much of its discussion to points of emphasis for the 2021-22 season. Eight states that normally conduct boys soccer in the fall were unable to play due to restrictions from COVID-19, and 18 other states had to modify their seasons in some way. On the girls side, six states were unable to play in the fall, and 15 states modified seasons.

"In addition to addressing the religious headwear situation, the committee agreed to continue three points of emphasis from last year and approved two new ones for the coming season," Wynns said. "One of the points we are continuing is to emphasize that high school athletics, and high school soccer, is education-based. Improving skills and winning games is a part of the overall goal; however, the quest to win games, events and championships cannot come at the expense of providing these educational opportunities."

In addition to this point of emphasis, others being continued from last year are **reckless and serious foul play**, and **properly worn uniforms and marked fields**.

The new points of emphasis for 2021-22 are **sportsmanship** and **professional responsibilities for officials**.

With regard to sportsmanship, the committee noted that the message of good sportsmanship should be addressed by school administration with their students, coaches, parents and spectators alike, which includes a message that prohibits taunting and the use of profanity during games.

A complete listing of the soccer rules changes will be available on the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org. Click on "Activities & Sports" at the top of the home page and select "Soccer."

According to the most recent NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey, soccer is the fifth most popular high school sport for boys with 459,077 participants in 12,552 schools nationwide. Soccer is the fourth most popular sport for girls with 394,105 participants in 12,107 schools.

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About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and performing arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,500 high schools and 12 million participants in high school activity programs, including almost eight million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; offers online publications and services for high school coaches and officials; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, speech and debate coaches, and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org.

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