

# NJSIAA

## STATE TOURNAMENT OPERATING PROCEDURES



**2025-2026**

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### **Tournament Regulations Statement**

NJSIAA reserves the right to adjust, change or cancel dates, times, and locations for all NJSIAA State tournaments. Schools entering the tournament will not be granted a change of date/time due to any conflicts with school trips, proms, banquets, SATs, unless agreed upon by both schools. During the spring tournament season, we will make every effort to accommodate schools that have a conflict with their graduation.

Member schools will not be eligible to participate in any NJSIAA Tournaments if it has violated the NJSIAA Constitution, Bylaws, Rules, Regulations, Guidelines, Policies, or Procedures. Any student-athlete who transfers after the competition start date will not be eligible for this tournament (Bylaws, Article V, Section 4.K. 5).

Schools are to be reminded of the 3-team DQ rule for state tournament eligibility, which states “Any varsity team accumulating three or more player or coach disqualifications prior to the team’s participation in the state tournament will not be permitted to participate in the state tournament. The 3-team DQ rule is not applicable during participation in the state tournament.

The NJSIAA will follow the procedure below for schools that are disqualified from state tournament competition:

1. If a school is disqualified, either for the use of an ineligible player or violating the 3-team DQ rule, from state tournament competition after the tournament has been seeded but prior to the bracket being final, then the bracket will be reseeded and the next ranked school who entered the tournament will be included.
2. If a school is disqualified, either for the use of an ineligible player or violating the 3-team DQ rule, from state tournament competition after the tournament has been seeded and after the bracket is final, then the bracket will not be reseeded, and no additional school will be included.
3. If a school is disqualified from state tournament competition due to the use of an ineligible player during the state tournament, then the school will be removed from the tournament immediately and their last opponent will advance in their place.

Schools participating in any NJSIAA tournament are responsible for the actions and behaviors of their spectators. Schools are required to provide adequate staff security to ensure there is proper oversight of their spectators. In addition, schools are financially responsible for any damage to the property or premises caused by their student-athletes, staff, or spectators (spectators include, but are not limited to, cheerleaders, marching band participants, students, and other fans).

NJSIAA requires Certified Athletic Trainers at all its tournament events. The ATC must document all injuries on an injury report form. This form must be available to the NJSIAA upon request.

Member schools that are not willing or able to comply with NJSIAA tournament regulations and any relevant procedures found in the “State Tournament Operating Procedures” handbook should not enter the tournament. Member schools are encouraged to review NJSIAA tournament regulations with the school administration. Coaches must have a copy of the tournament regulations as well as a copy of the rule modifications (if any) available at all contests. Copies of these documents are available on the NJSIAA website.

### **State Tournament Entry Procedures**

Complete tournament information can be found on our website for each sport. Schools are urged to review the tournament regulations for the sport they are entering especially tournament qualifications and entry guidelines.

The NJSIAA will follow the late entry procedure below:

1. All entries after the entry due date are considered late and subject to a fine.
2. All late entries after the seeding meeting and before the brackets become official, will be fined and only be placed in a bracket and or tournament if there is room. In this scenario, teams or athletes will be seeded last. Brackets will not be reseeded.
3. All entries after the bracket become official will not be accepted.

Note: The only time a bracket or event will be reseeded is in the case of an NJSIAA mistake.

### **State Tournament Schedule, Dates, and Times**

**Tournament Schedule** - The state tournament schedule is determined by the NJSIAA in consultation with the sport specific committee and approved by the NJSIAA Executive Committee.

**Tournament Dates** - The tournament dates listed can be moved only upon mutual agreement by both schools. If schools do not agree, then it must be played on the date listed. If any date is moved by mutual agreement, the potential next round of opponents must be notified ASAP.

**Tournament Times** - Start times for all state tournament contests hosted by a higher-seeded school will be determined by the higher-seeded school. In the event of a disagreement between schools regarding start times, the NJSIAA reserves the right to establish the official start time for extraordinary circumstances only.

Athletic Directors must communicate consistently through all rounds of the state tournament regarding contest dates, start times, postponements and the rescheduling of contests.

Responsibility for postponing a contest shall rest with the host school. It is recommended (if possible) that the host school notify their opponent before the departure of the visiting school's buses at the latest.

Celebratory events (i.e., senior night, homecoming, teacher recognition, etc.) are not permitted during pregame, postgame, or halftime at any NJSIAA state tournament events.

In the event a bus arrives late, that team will be permitted a minimum 30-minute warmup period from the time the bus arrives on site.

### **State Tournament Sites**

State tournament sites will not be declared unsuitable merely because conditions are less than perfect unless Leagues or Conferences have ruled such sites unsuitable for League or Conference play. NJSIAA reserves the right to move an event to another facility if the playing conditions are not considered suitable for that competition.

### **State Tournament Brackets**

In all state tournaments conducted by NJSIAA, each member school must compete in its own group and section classification, unless fewer than eight (8) schools qualify. In that case, the NJSIAA may combine one or more groups with executive committee approval.

State tournament seeding and brackets do not become official until noon on the day after seeding. The media may post brackets following the completion of the seeding meeting; however, they are not official. Once the brackets become official, there will be no changes to the bracket. If a school is unable to play for any reason after the brackets are final, then the opponent will advance.

### **Assignment of Officials**

The NJSIAA state tournament assignor will assign all officials for all rounds of each state tournament. Please refer to the sports specific tournament regulations located on the NJSIAA website for more specific information regarding who to call for your assignments.

### **Transfers**

A student who transfers after the NJSIAA Competition Start Date for each sport, regardless of whether the transfer was the student's first transfer, shall be ineligible to participate in any post-season championship competition at the new school.

### **Protests**

Protests based upon an official's judgment, or misinterpretation or misapplication of the playing rules will not be honored as per NJSIAA Bylaws, Article VII, Section 1.

### **Emergency Action Plans**

All host schools must have an emergency action plan (EAP) in place for all possible situations that may arise. The EAP of the host school will be in effect during all state tournament events. The EAP must include a line of communication for emergent situations. In addition, all host facilities must have an automated external defibrillator (AED) on site and all medical personnel must know where it is located.

### **Staff Security (Non-Police)**

Host schools must provide an adequate amount of staff security as needed based on the host school's facility and the magnitude of the event. Any adjustments by the NJSIAA regarding staff security will be communicated to the schools involved at the time of the event.

Visiting schools must provide at least two (2) staff members for football events and at least one (1) staff member for all other events. These staff members must not be associated with the coaching staff and are responsible for maintaining control of their spectators. However, the visiting school has the responsibility to provide an adequate amount of staff security as needed based on the anticipated attendance at the event. The NJSIAA will not reimburse visiting schools for staff security.

### **Police**

It is up to the host school to determine the amount of police security (if any) is needed based on the host school's facility and the magnitude of the event. Any adjustments by the NJSIAA regarding police coverage will be communicated to the schools involved at the time of the event.

### **Crowd Control**

Effective crowd control management is an integral component to a successful athletic event. NJSIAA requires participating schools to provide adequate staff to ensure proper oversight of their spectators.

The following guidelines must be adhered to by all participating schools in an NJSIAA state tournament:

1. Spectators are to be segregated and adequate seating for both home and away teams must be clearly marked.
2. Staff security must introduce themselves to the host site director, or tournament director, prior to the game.

3. If there is the potential for inclement weather, then the host site director, or tournament director, must provide instructions to the staff security on where and how to safely evacuate the spectators.
4. The host site director, or tournament director, must provide instructions to the staff security as to who is onsite in the case of a medical emergency and where the AED is located.
5. The host site director, or tournament director, must be made aware of spectator buses prior to the game to ensure there is an appropriate entrance and adequate seating.
6. Spectators are prohibited from standing on bleachers or chairs at all venues. Staff security is expected to monitor their spectators to ensure they do not stand on bleachers or chairs.
7. Staff security is responsible for ensuring all spectators leave the facility and do not enter the playing area or approach the officials as they are leaving the facility.
8. Game officials should be escorted by school personnel while entering and exiting the facility. When available, officials should be parked away from the fans.

### **Handshake**

The NJSIAA strongly believes that the handshake at the end of every interscholastic contest is an important part of sportsmanship. Emphasizing the importance of the handshake is a valuable practice in promoting sportsmanship. The NJSIAA's stance is that it highlights a critical lesson for student-athletes and coaches while demonstrating respect and integrity regardless of the outcome.

Walking away from the handshake due to a tough loss sends the wrong message, suggesting that poor sportsmanship is acceptable in the face of defeat. Student-athletes and coaches engaging in post-competition handshakes can teach valuable life skills such as resilience, humility, and respect for their opponents. This practice helps to foster a positive sports culture and prepares our student-athletes for future challenges both on and off the field.

### **Handshake Procedure**

1. It is the schools/coaches' responsibility to supervise the handshake. Administrators/security should be stationed within close proximity to the handshake line. Officials are not required to supervise the handshake.
2. One team should be on the right and the other team should be on the left. Players from one team should not be allowed to walk down both sides of the line.
3. Absolutely no non-essential personnel should be allowed on the playing surface until both teams have reached a designated area after completion of the handshake line.
4. A coach or site personnel should be stationed at the end of the handshake line to direct the players who have completed the handshake to a designated area.
5. Best practice is to have coaches at the front and end of the line. If that is not practical, a coach at the end of the line is mandatory.

### **Players Leaving the Bench Area**

Any player that leaves the bench area during an altercation, regardless of whether the player engages in the altercation, shall be disqualified, and will be subject to the disqualification penalty (automatically disqualified from the next two contests, except football which is one game.) Only coaches can leave the bench with the purpose of restraining players and/or stopping altercations.

Any player who leaves the bench area at any point during an interscholastic event is automatically disqualified. If an official is unable to identify the player(s) who left the bench area, then the official must report the incident to NJSIAA staff as soon as the event is completed so that video can be reviewed to determine which player(s) should be disqualified.

### **NJSIAA use of video for sportsmanship violations**

NJSIAA reserves the right to use video for the following situations:

1. To identify if a violation of our sportsmanship policy occurred and to determine if additional disqualifications are necessary.
2. To correctly identify the players that have left the bench.
3. To ensure that disqualifications are correctly identified.

NJSIAA staff will be responsible for entering these additional disqualifications into the DQ system.

### **Sportsmanship Statement**

Per the memorandum of understanding between the NJSIAA and the NJ Attorney General's Office on Division of Civil Rights, the following is a public service announcement (PSA) that is required to be read several times before and during all interscholastic events, including NJSIAA state tournament events, in which the public announcement system is operated:

*Today's contest is being conducted according to the rules of the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association. These rules provide for fair competition among players. Spectators can help promote good sportsmanship by observing the rules of fair play. Any verbal, written, or physical conduct related to race, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, or religion shall not be tolerated, could subject the violator to ejection, and may result in penalties being assessed against your team. Everyone is requested to take personal responsibility for keeping this competition at a high level of good sportsmanship.*

### **Athletic Training Coverage**

1. Each school is asked to provide athletic trainer coverage for their team throughout the state tournament.
2. When state tournament games are played at a higher-seeded or pre-determined schools' facility, the host school must provide athletic training coverage.
3. When state tournament games are played at a neutral site, both teams are expected to provide athletic training coverage.
  - a. If only one school can provide an athletic trainer, it is up to both schools to work together and share the athletic trainer.
  - b. If both schools cannot provide athletic trainer coverage, NJSIAA must be contacted immediately.

NJSIAA will provide athletic training coverage for the following tournament events:

- All cross-country events
- All gymnastics events
- Tennis team semifinals and finals
- Tennis singles & doubles tournament (all rounds)
- Diving individual championships
- Bowling team semifinals & finals
- Bowling individual finals
- Fencing team finals
- Fencing individual championships
- Swimming team finals
- Swimming individual semifinals and finals
- All winter track events
- All golf events
- All spring track events

### **Tickets**

Tickets for state tournament events will be sold online for most events. NJSIAA will contact the host schools directly regarding online ticket sales. NJSIAA requires that 40% of tickets be reserved for the

visiting school when a facility is expected to be at capacity. Please notify NJSIAA ASAP if you have any concern regarding this.

Schools hosting outdoor events may choose to use the 60/40 ticket allocation procedure, however, this allocation must be approved by the NJSIAA Director. If NJSIAA determines the host site may severely restrict the number of fans that can attend the game, then NJSIAA may move the game to another facility.

NJSIAA appreciates host schools honoring anyone with an NJSIAA Gold Pass indicating their service on the Executive Committee. In addition, NJSIAA appreciates host schools honoring tournament staff with an NJSIAA sport-specific pass.

### **Visiting Team Admission**

All visiting teams must fill out the state tournament personnel form located on each sports webpage. This form is for the Athletic Director, staff security, school administrators, and board members to receive free admission when tickets are sold. This form must be completed for each round of the state tournament, beginning with the sectional finals. This form must be forwarded to the host school, or the coach can bring a copy with them to the contest.

### **Complimentary Admission**

NJSIAA ensures that no one is ever deprived of the opportunity to watch a family member participate in an NJSIAA state tournament because of financial hardship. Schools are encouraged to request complimentary tickets for those families who may not be able to purchase tickets due to financial hardship. The Complimentary Admission Form can be found on the NJSIAA website under the ADs menu.

### **School Photographers**

NJSIAA allows school district approved photographers at its team state championship events when easily accommodated by the host facility. Schools wishing to have a school district approved photographer attend its event must email Liz Nodeland ([enodeland@njsiaa.org](mailto:enodeland@njsiaa.org)) in writing at least 48 hours prior to the event. The email must include the name and contact information of the photographer. Only one photographer per participating school will be allowed and the photographer must show proper ID upon arrival.

Please note that requests for school photographers will not be accommodated for individual state championship events with student-athletes from multiple schools participating, such as the wrestling individual state championships, track and field meet of champions, etc.

### **Press Credentials**

NJSIAA does not issue press credentials for the regular season or state tournament events hosted by a member school. It is up to the member school hosting the event to determine who will be allowed press access. Members of the press are instructed to contact a member school directly in advance to ensure they will comply with school district policies. The NJSIAA Press Credential Policy can be found on the NJSIAA website under “Inside NJSIAA”.

### **Broadcast Rights**

For all preliminary rounds (i.e., prior to the sectional final round), schools may broadcast their state tournament event at their discretion. Starting with the sectional final round, broadcast requests must be submitted to NJSIAA at least 48 hours prior to the start of the event – this includes school-based organizations. NJSIAA will notify a host school directly via email when a 3<sup>rd</sup> party has been approved to broadcast the event.

No person or organization is allowed to broadcast a state tournament event, starting with the sectional final round, without NJSIAA written approval. Please contact Liz Nodeland ([enodeland@njsiaa.org](mailto:enodeland@njsiaa.org)) with any questions. The NJSIAA Broadcast Rights Policy can be found on the NJSIAA website under “Inside NJSIAA”.

### **Procedure In the Event of Thunder or Lightning**

#### **Mandatory:**

1. Suspend play, or delay the commencement of the contest, for 30 minutes. All participants and spectators shall vacate the outdoor venue to a designated safer area immediately. A list of the closest safer areas should be announced and displayed at all outdoor venues. Clear instructions should be given over the public address system (if available) to guide participants and spectators to safer areas.
2. Once Play has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or lightning is witnessed prior to resuming play.
3. Any subsequent thunder or lightning after the beginning of the 30-minute count will reset the clock and another 30-minute count shall begin. If, for example, the contest is suspended at 8:00pm due to a lightning strike, and then lightning is witnessed again at 8:25pm, the earliest the contest may resume is 8:55pm.

#### **Voluntary Guidelines:**

4. If thunder or lightning persists, and access to the field for warmups cannot resume 75 minutes after the initial suspension of play, the contest shall be postponed to a later date.
5. If participants can safely return to the field of play within 75 minutes, the players shall participate in a brief warmup period, and the contest shall resume.
6. Athletic Administrators, coaches & officials may agree to alter #'s 4 & 5 if all agree. If an agreement on how long to wait cannot be reached, then 75 minutes will be used.
7. For Football only, the host school site management shall determine how long to suspend the game before it is postponed

### **Procedure when officials fail to arrive or are unable to continue**

When only one (1) official arrives for the game to which two (2) officials are usually assigned, the game must be played. The same applies when an official is unable to complete an assignment.

Every attempt should be made to play the game unless it can be clearly established that doing so would NOT be in the best interest of the participating schools. The responsibility for postponing a game under these circumstances rests with the Principal and the Athletic Director of the host school, this is not a coaching staff decision.

Schools withholding their teams from competition under these conditions will be subject to severe punitive action under Article X of the Bylaws and officials are required to report the violation to the NJSIAA within seven (7) days.

In the event that no officials arrive at the site, the game will be postponed. Visiting schools may not ask for a forfeit under this scenario.

### **Drone Policy**

1. The use of unmanned aerial systems (“UAS”), commonly referred to as “drones”, by any NJSIAA member school is permitted during practice and at home events in accordance with applicable local, State, and Federal laws and regulations.
2. Member schools are permitted to use UAS at away events with the advance written permission of the host school, or, in the event, there is no home school, the site manager.
3. If only one school operates a UAS at an event, the UAS video shall be provided to all other participating schools as soon as practicable after the conclusion of the event.

4. The use of UAS at an NJSIAA tournament event is strictly prohibited.

### **Bands, Pep Bands, P/A Systems, Music, Sound Effects & Noise Makers**

The performing and playing of music and the use of sound effects are part of the interscholastic athletic experience, making for an exciting environment for all participants. It is important for those in charge of overseeing these activities to maintain proper sportsmanship and follow rules when these activities are permitted.

To maintain a proper perspective and to ensure equity in competition for the participating teams, NJSIAA expects participating schools to adhere to the following guidelines when playing music which provide an appropriate playing schedule.

1. Before the game begins
2. During time-outs, except injury time-outs
3. Between quarters
4. At halftime of the contest
5. At the end of the contest
6. For football – during the contest up until either team huddles up. In the event both teams do not huddle, then when the center touches the ball, or the kicker strikes the ball on a free kick.

At any time during the contest, the game officials may ask the site director to correct unsportsmanlike conduct by band members which may result in the stoppage of music for the remainder of the game or removal from the game.

All mechanical and/or prefabricated noisemaking/sound effect devices at outdoor NJSIAA state tournament events shall be permitted if all guidelines above are followed. The host facilities' rules regarding prefabricated noisemaking/sound effect devices will supersede these guidelines. These devices are not permitted at any NJSIAA indoor state tournament events.

Pep Bands at indoor NJSIAA state tournament events shall be permitted if all guidelines above are followed. The host facilities' rules regarding pep bands will supersede these guidelines.

### **Cheer & Dance Teams**

Cheer teams and dance performances are part of the interscholastic athletic experience, making for an exciting environment for all participants. It is important for those in charge of overseeing these activities to maintain proper sportsmanship and follow instructions when these activities are permitted.

Cheers should be positive, not aimed at antagonizing an opponent. Care should be taken in making certain that words used in a cheer are not suggestive and do not have a connotation that would inflame an audience. Dance performances should be appropriate, and music should be appropriate for an interscholastic event.

### **Signs & Banners**

NJSIAA allows signs, banners, and the like, at state tournament events. All items must be approved by the school district and must not block the view of any spectators. Spectators sitting in the stands are prohibited from holding up signs, banners, and the like.

### **Face Paint**

1. Face paint must be appropriate and respectful. It should not include offensive symbols, language, or imagery.
2. Face paint should be in school colors to show team spirit.

3. Face paint should not obstruct the eyes or any part of the face in a way that could be dangerous.
4. Fans with face paint should not engage in behavior that disrupts the event or endangers others.

**Mascots**

1. Mascots must be approved by school officials and should represent the school's values and spirit.
2. Mascots should behave in a manner that is respectful and non-disruptive. They should not engage in taunting or unsportsmanlike conduct.
3. Mascots should ensure that their costumes do not pose a safety hazard to themselves or others.
4. Mascots are typically expected to promote positive school spirit and sportsmanship.