
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

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News for School Clients

WIAA Regulation of Summer and Off-Season Athletic Practices

As summer approaches, student-athletes are already preparing for the upcoming year of high school athletics. It is permissible for athletes and coaches to prepare for their sport of choice during the summer or off-season; however, the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA), through rules adopted by its members, regulates the extent to which high school athletic teams may participate in organized practices outside of the officially-recognized season. The WIAA recently adopted rule changes to allow more coaching contact outside of the athletic season.

WIAA regulations apply to basketball, cross country, golf, hockey, soccer, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, and volleyball for both boys and girls; football, baseball, and wrestling for boys only; and gymnastics and softball for girls only. Other school-sponsored teams are not subject to WIAA regulations. Each year, the WIAA sets the earliest date that each athletic team may begin official practices. Prior to the first day of practice, the team members and coach(es) may meet only in accordance with WIAA rules.

During the school year, but outside of a team's pre-determined season, team members may not meet, train, practice, or conduct any activities that in any way resemble a school team that is practicing or competing during the off-season. Team members may participate together on a club team outside of

the school, but the club team may not be limited only to members of the school team. Team captains may not coordinate training sessions that resemble team practices, even if participation is voluntary. Schools are permitted to open their facilities for student use during the off-season, such as by offering access to gyms or weight rooms, provided use of the facilities is not restricted to students on the basis of team affiliation.

Less stringent rules apply during the summertime. During the summer, there are no restrictions on the *voluntary* gathering of students for purposes of practicing and training for the athletic season, so long as there is no school or coach involvement. During the summertime only, it is acceptable for team captains or other team members to lead structured practices (sometimes referred to as "captain's practices"), if the coach is not involved and attendance at the practices is voluntary. It would be unacceptable, however, for a coach to dictate training programs for the team members to follow. Participation in voluntary summer practices may not be a requirement for making a school team or earning any other incentive.

In addition to the summer practice sessions in which students may participate without the involvement of school staff or the coach, coaches are permitted up to five "unrestricted coach contact days." The coach contact days do not need to be consecutive. The only

exception is that football coaches are permitted a maximum of four coach contact days, and the four days must be consecutive. Coach contact days may only occur between the end of the school year and July 31 of the same year. During coach contact days, the coach may organize structured meetings, instruction, training, and/or competition, and the school may be involved by providing facilities, equipment, transportation, and staffing. For example, a coach may use the coach contact days to conduct a five-day intensive training camp, or to hold Saturday scrimmages on five weekends throughout the summer. Student participation during the coach contact days must be voluntary. Although the coach contact days may be targeted to prospective team members, participation must be open to all students.

In addition to the pre-approved coach contact days, schools, through their coaches, may run an unlimited number of summer training clinics for students entering grades nine and under. Current high school student-athletes may serve as clinicians during the clinics for a maximum of six days prior to July 31 alongside the coach, without violating the prohibition against coach contact in excess of the allocated coach contact days.

Throughout the school year and summer, coaches may hold supervisory positions that would place them in contact with their athletes. However, the supervisory involvement may not involve activity that could be regarded as coaching or instruction in the specific sport to be coached.

If you have any questions regarding this topic, please call any of the following members of the Lathrop & Clark LLP School, Municipal, Labor and Employment Law Team.

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For example, a gymnastics coach may supervise the high school weight room, and may demonstrate proper weight lifting technique and explain general principles of training, but may not provide specific training regimens to his or her athletes. Similarly, a basketball coach may not supervise an open basketball gym period that includes his or her team members if his or her supervision would involve direct demonstration of basketball drills and plays, as such instruction would be too closely related to the sport she coaches.

During the summer, coaches in the sports of baseball, cross country, golf, gymnastics, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, and wrestling may have coaching contact with their athletes in excess of the five unrestricted days through non-school organizations, such as a municipal softball league or a private tennis club. The WIAA recognizes that there may be a shortage of qualified coaches in those sports. Therefore, it is acceptable for an individual to coach a high school team during the school year and also a non-school team during the summer. The only restriction is that the summer team may not be composed exclusively of members of the high school team.

Due to the schools' unfamiliarity with the recent changes to the regulations, some uncertainty is understandable, but careful compliance with the WIAA regulations is crucial to avoid having students, or even entire teams, declared ineligible for the upcoming athletic season.