

## **SANCTIONING SWIMMING FOR IDAHO HIGH SCHOOLS – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What is the IHSAA?**

The Idaho High School Activities Association (IHSAA) is the state's governing body for high school athletics and activities. The IHSAA is a nonprofit corporation made up of 157 regular member schools in six districts across the state. The organization was started in 1925 to provide structure to informal interscholastic contests and to support the accurate belief that activities participation enhances academic achievement. The IHSAA not only oversees sports competitions and practice, they also regulate debate, drama, dance, cheer, and music. Each state has a governing entity such as this, the 51 state organizations known collectively as the National Federation of State High School Associations, to make sure high school activities are fair and organized.

### **What is sanctioning?**

A sanction is an official approval. The IHSAA sanctions extracurricular activities which have been chosen based on participation, interest, and more recently, to fill Title IX requirements for gender equity. For example, football, basketball, and track are sanctioned sports while swimming is not. Since swimming is not sanctioned, school districts are under no obligation to support their high schools' swim teams. With no support at the district level, high schools within that district are not obligated—nor may they be able—to recognize the efforts of these athletes. In most Idaho schools, high school swimmers cannot earn an IHSAA varsity sports letter nor are they eligible for Athlete of the Year honors. This is because swimming is not a sanctioned sport. Many of Idaho's high school swimmers feel their school administration's failure to recognize them gives the message: "Swimming is not a real sport. You are not a real athlete."

### **What is the AIHSS?**

In 1989 a committee formed to create a season for Idaho swimmers to compete for their high schools. Idaho's first High School Swimming Championship featured 50 athletes from four schools. As you know, students love to race in name of their school, and Idaho high school swimming continued to grow. In 2008, the Association of Idaho High School Swimming (AIHSS) was formed after being turned down for sanctioning by the IHSAA due to a moratorium on adding new sports. At this time, the leaders of Idaho high school swimming adopted bylaws to mirror IHSAA rules as closely as possible. Since 2008, the AIHSS has seen competitors from 88 Idaho high schools. In 2015, over 1,000 athletes competed at a total of 46 formal competitions across Idaho.

**If sanctioned, would my high school have to start a swim team?**

The choice to adopt swimming would be made at the school district level and then by high schools within that district. There are many schools which offer only offer one or two IHSAA sports. We cannot speak for school district-level decisions, but if sanctioned, schools are legally obligated to make the decision to offer, or not offer, swimming to their students based on student participation and interest.

**If sanctioned, would my high school have to have or build a pool?**

No, each school does not need their own pool. Teams could continue to rent and share pool space.

**Wouldn't it cost more to "Pay to Play" if swimming was sanctioned?**

Again, sports participation fees are decided by each school district individually. There are school districts in Northern Idaho which do not require students to pay fees to participate in activities, but overwhelmingly, Idaho school districts are charging high school athletes \$75-\$150 per sport per athlete. Many schools charge participants additional fees for uniforms and travel. Ask yourself: what do you pay now to swim? Then, ask people who participate in track or basketball: how much did you pay to play? I think you will find the dollar amounts comparable.

**We heard today that as a sanctioned sport, there would be no more volunteers; everyone involved (coaches, referees, officials, even timers) would have to be paid. True or false?**

If officials were paid to oversee events, this would be factored in to the each school district's budget. All high school events require parents support and volunteerism to run smoothly. The IHSAA uses as many volunteers as they can to run the State tournaments, as do the schools to run other competitions. If someone is willing to volunteer, they take it. The IHSAA pays officials for basketball, football, etc, so swimming would probably pay the referee or starter—which can be one official in smaller meets. Of course, the referee or starter could always say they would not accept payment. One of the main things sanctioning provides (besides the credibility, equality and respect to its participants) is the stability of the school systems to manage the program under a set of rules that actually have clout within the IHSAA system. As it stands now, the AIHSS is a volunteer organization. We have seen teams come and go because the volunteer base no longer volunteers, thus no program.

**My school administrators say they don't have the money to add swimming and they never, ever, ever will.**

Everyone understands school budgets are tight. But the truth is that school districts have money budgeted to fund extracurricular activities. How those funds are budgeted should reflect the needs and interests of the students, not just the status quo.

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**What would IHSAA sanctioning mean for my year round swimmer?**

High school swimming and year round swim clubs are different entities. In the spirit of keeping high school sports amateur endeavors—as an addendum to the academic experience—the IHSAA does not allow a high school coach to supervise and instruct his or her athlete year round. This is called the Rule of Two. Many of Idaho’s high school swimmers also belong to United States Swimming (USA-S), a year round activity. A number of high school clubs are currently coached year round by USA-S coaches. It is true that like youth soccer, volleyball, and basketball, high school coaches would not be allowed to be swimmers’ USA-S/year-round coach.

**Will becoming an IHSAA sanctioned sport negatively affect my year round swimmer?**

Between the 2016 Southwest and Eastern District Championship meets, 43% of swimmers (296/692) were current USA-S athletes. The sanctioning process is concerned with addressing the needs and the inclusion of high school swimmers—who are the majority participants.

**Is it true that if sanctioned, the high school season would move from fall to a different season?**

This is a rumor that has not been substantiated.

**Is it true sanctioning will force most competitive swimmers to drop high school swimming because they will not be able to train the way that they need to for scholarships and competitive swimming?**

If an athlete is going to compete at the college level it would be because a) they started swimming early and are not burnt out; b) they get good grades; c) they won the genetic lottery in some or all ways and are physically skilled (fast/big/strong/blessed MaxVO<sub>2</sub>); d) they are willing to work hard; and e) their parents and coaches help them get noticed by a school. If a swimmer meets most of these qualifications (especially C and E), whether or not he or she has the option of training with a different coach for 12 weeks a year is extremely unlikely to mean they are unable to earn a spot in a college program. Ultimately, if a swimmer and coach decide they cannot compete in the high school season because it would negatively impact his or her swimming career, that is their choice.

**Can my high school swimmer still compete in a USA Swimming meet?**

The IHSAA allows “Exceptional student-athletes to participate in a maximum of two special events... without loss of eligibility provided.”

### **Would men’s swimming be dropped by schools because of Title IX?**

The title IX act of 1972 requires schools to protect students against discrimination in education, including athletics. The proposal the IHSAA is considering includes both men’s and women’s swimming. Most schools have more male athletes than female athletes, and in order to meet the law and provide opportunities equally, schools do consider the impact of adding another sport. The decision as to which IHSAA sanctioned sports will be offered in a school district is made by each school district board individually. It is important to note the purpose of Title IX is to include women, and it has done so. Since the early 70s, the number of high school girls who participate in sports has gone from 1 in 27 to 1 in 2.5. There is a false belief this has been at the expense of boys, but in actuality, between 1972 and now, the number of high school boys who participate in sports remains at 1 in 2.

### **How would the IHSAA run swim meets? How would the State and District Championships work?**

Like other sanctioned Idaho sports, swimming competitions would be governed under National Federation (NFHS) rules. The AIHSS currently runs meets by following the NFHS rulebook for invitationals, dual/tri meets, and championships. There would not be any major changes to the way the swimming schedule works. The IHSAA is still researching the best model—full sanctioning or in-season sanctioning with the AIHSS running the State Meet. The IHSAA is considering a cross country model where kids (teams) would qualify for State (by division) at the District Meet. There is an option of the IHSAA sanctioning the season but not the State Championship, like baseball does. In that case, the AIHSS would still run the State Meet, but one change would be that although swimmers continue to race together (as they do now), they would be awarded a place in the division they represent. The track & field model is also being looked at. There will be divisions (larger to smaller) no matter what.

### **Could our teams still form cooperatives?**

Yes! In fact, forming cooperative teams through the IHSAA has more lenient and inclusive rules than the AIHSS. Again, allowing teams to form cooperative programs is in the hands of each individual school district, most of which already have cooperative programs in place. There is a rumor that teams could no longer practice together cooperatively because it would constitute a “competition” every time more than one team shares space. This is also not true.

### **I guess I am kind of happy now. I mean, I get super bummed out that my school doesn’t consider us “real athletes” or provide any financial support to my team of 30 athletes... But wouldn’t it be really difficult to make this change?**

There are places in Idaho which have already effectively sanctioned our sport! There are several school districts in Northern Idaho which fully recognize swimming, alongside sanctioned

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sport. Rigby School District has been supporting its growing team for the past three years as well. 48 other states have figured out how to work through these problems, including the sparsely populated (think small schools) and relatively poor (with respect) states like Montana. There are over 1,000 Idaho high school athletes who cannot truly represent their school. This lack of respect, support, and acknowledgement is exceedingly frustrating and outright painful for the majority of high school swim teams, athletes, and coaches. We should not let a minority of year round swimmers make this decision for all Idaho high school swimmers. It will take a few years to iron out all the wrinkles for a new program, but we should not let misinformation, fear of change, and short-sightedness guide the decision.