The MIAA State Basketball Committee appreciates the many positive responses we received following the distribution of the 2015-16 newsletter. This feedback is ample encouragement to follow-up with this edition of pre-season MIAA basketball news. Included are a number of repeat/revised items from a year ago, with additional areas offered as important and timely topics. We recommend and hope that school administrators and Athletic Directors will not only review its contents but also share with your coaches and other athletic community members.

Since the completion of the 2016 tournament season, the State Basketball Committee has been active in evaluating our work and establishing new goals and objectives. Committee Chair Mike Lahiff and Executive Liaison Jim Peters wish to thank and recognize a number of Committee members who assisted in several basketball related projects, including sub-committee work performed at the sectional and state-wide levels to complete Four-Year Alignment recommendations, as well as summer sub-committee work that examined a number of basketball topics.

**The 2017 MIAA Basketball Finals: “The Road to Springfield”**

The formal announcement/press release highlighting the return to the “Birthplace of Basketball” for the 2017 state basketball final games (8) preceded this newsletter. It is exciting to note that once again our 800 boys’ and girls’ varsity basketball teams state-wide will vie for the 16 coveted spots in this weekend (March 17-18) of basketball related activities. Co-hosted by the Naismith Memorial Hall of Fame and the Western Mass. Sports Commission, the overall event experience will prove to be a lifetime athletic highlight for the qualifying teams and student athletes. For additional immediate information, we invite you to preview the formal proposal presented to the Basketball Committee ([Click Here](#)).

In order to keep the lines of communication open and up-to-date, we plan on relaunching the MIAA State Basketball Tournament (“The Road to Springfield”) website in the near future. It will be initially designed in order to be easily revised and updated as more information becomes available. Schools/teams with the potential and goal to reach this pinnacle event should keep their eyes open for updates.
The following provides a quick snap-shot of the most exciting aspects of the updated partnership:

- **All state semi-final games** (North/South and Central/West) will be completed on Monday and Tuesday (weather permitting). As early as Wednesday morning (March 15), the schedule for the eight state final games (4 divisions/gender) will be determined by MIAA tournament staff.

- There will be four games at each of the two playing venues - The Mass Mutual Center and Springfield College. Saturday game times and sites will be determined and communicated based on all considerations, especially projected crowd bases from the participating schools.

- As early as late Wednesday morning, all schools/teams will be notified as to the game time and site. In addition, schools will be provided/offered a Friday practice time at the game venue site. Along with this information will be immediate contact information to begin the coordination and planning for the Friday arrival. Each school will be provided up to ten complimentary hotel rooms, and the Western Mass. Sports Commission staff and various hotel staff will help guide the reservation information, arrival times, and other related needs. Tournament Rate packages will be available for additional interest or needs from the school and community.

- IMPORTANT POINT OF EMPHASIS: Finalist schools planning on full participation in the Friday schedule, including the venue practice, will need to coordinate an early Friday school dismissal and departure.

- The partnership group will help guide the overall timing/planning for each school; including the order and timing of practice, lunch and hotel check-in. This will vary for each game/school. Schools will be required to plan for and organize travel arrangements. However, following review of last year’s post season survey of all state finalist schools, the partnership will be supporting the recommendation to offer transportation within the city for the twenty-four plus hours between the school-sponsored bus drop-off on Friday through arrival to the Saturday game venue. This will eliminate the possible need for overnight bus and driver costs.

- Friday activities will culminate with an evening State Finals Celebration Banquet on center court at the Hall of Fame. With all teams and designated school leaders present, a special keynote address from a Naismith Hall of Fame Inductee will highlight the program.

- Team tours of the Basketball Hall of Fame will again be available, and a Saturday morning team breakfast will be an additional program enhancement.
Again, please keep your eyes and ears open for ongoing communications. We hope to see this potential opportunity for our 16 finalist teams to be a state-wide motivation from the very first days of the pre-season practices.

**Game Officials**

The broad topic of Game Officials was discussed at length as part of summer sub-committee work and the fall Basketball Committee meeting. A summary of the topics will be shared below.

- **Tournament Game Official Recommendations:** With reference to the posted MIAA Basketball Format- “**For the 2017 tournament season, the MIAA will not require AD’s and coaches to recommend officials for utilization in the assigning of tournament officials. League Assignor recommendations will be utilized for tournament assignments**”.

- **Tournament Home Site Supervisors: Game Officials Topics and Responsibilities:**
  
  - A host site worker should be prepared to greet the game officials upon arrival to the venue and escort them to their designated private locker room area.
  - Site personnel should be available to escort the game officials to their locker room areas both at half-time and following the completion of the postgame handshake protocol.

**Neutral Site Options and Selection**

Our Tournament Directors are faced with the yearly challenges in both finding appropriate neutral site venues and establishing a tournament schedule that best meets the needs of the association and the participating schools. We acknowledge that the final scheduling of games may not equally satisfy the participating schools, but it is in everyone’s best interest to better articulate the issues involved.

As Directors begin compiling their list of potential sites, they must take into account a given venue’s size, seating capacity, parking, and any safety concerns. A site may be considered appropriate for one or more divisions based on these determinations. Thus, Directors may find themselves with limited options if a section/division creates greater issues and limitations. While the brackets with site selections can be communicated in advance (or early) in some cases, this is not possible in many other situations.
A few additional comments and clarifications may help address “frequently asked questions”:

- Geography (travel time) cannot become the primary variable, although we acknowledge it is best when schools face similar travel time. All the conditions shared above illustrate the difficulty.
- How does the Committee define a neutral court? While the goal is to prevent one school from having a clear competitive advantage, we must be careful in not establishing overly stringent variables. For example, the Directors cannot be restricted from utilizing a site if one school has played as few as one or two games on that court during the regular season. Most importantly, a court should not be a regular “home site” or practice facility for either school.

Tournament Directors welcome and encourage your consideration in making your school venue available for neutral site rounds of play. If you feel your site meets the stated goals and you are interested in hosting neutral site games, please contact your sectional director and/or the MIAA office as soon as possible. Subsequent conversation could lead to much needed additions to our list of available sites.

**Court Storming**

The prevention and elimination of student spectator “court storming” incidents will remain an area of continued focus. While small in number over the past few seasons, they remain a concern of tournament staff and the State Basketball Committee. In particular, the concern magnifies itself at championship games in both the sectional and state-final rounds. The primary issue is one of safety, where personal injury can occur when spectators exit bleachers and rush the floor in an unauthorized manner.

MIAA basketball venues and the overall game environment create the greatest association challenges in this area. Collective efforts of our Tournament Directors, tournament staff, and school leaders resulted in clearly observed improvements in student section oversight during the past tournament season. The continued utilization of the published “Participating School Supervision Protocol” will guide ongoing cooperative efforts. The Committee wishes to remind all participating schools that the primary responsibility for oversight of student behaviors rests with the participating school leaders.
The following represents a listing of ongoing thoughts and recommendations from the State Committee:

- Spectator behavior expectations (and consequences) should be consistently communicated and applied throughout the season, beginning with our first regular season games and extending through tournament play. **Student sections are ultimately the responsibility of each individual member school administration.** Whether at a home or neutral site, “Court Storming” is strictly prohibited. At no time, whether it is before, during, or post game, are spectators allowed on the playing court.

- Recommendations include… 1.) The distribution of spectator expectations prior to the start of tournament play. 2.) Reinforcement of stated expectations throughout the tournament. 3.) Reminders through the school’s written communications (school/athletic handbooks, newsletters, etc.) and PA announcements at strategically determined times. 4.) Through placement of designated school supervisors at the game site, school leader visibility will prove to be the most effective deterrent.

- Prior to any level of tournament play, school leaders with any concern over potential spectator issues should address these with tournament/site staff as soon as possible. These concerns can also be addressed during a pre-game meeting between the site director and the designated school leaders.

The Committee will continue to monitor this topic and everyone’s assistance is recognized and appreciated.

**Four-Year Alignment Process and Appeal Schedule**

The upcoming winter season marks our final year in the initial four-year alignment cycle with the four divisional state-wide MIAA Basketball Tournament. Following MIAA Basketball Re-Alignment Sub-Committee work conducted during the winter-spring of the 2015-16 school year, the State Basketball Committee formally approved the proposed Four-Year Alignments (school years 2017-2018 through 2020-2021) as presently posted on the MIAA homepage.

Please be reminded that appeals of the posted basketball alignments must be received in the MIAA office no later than, December 21. Following receipt of an appeal, the MIAA office will follow-up with the announcement of an appeal day/time with the State Basketball Committee.
Late Filing Fees and Penalties

All school leaders are reminded that the MIAA Board of Directors have approved the Late Filing Fees/Penalties as posted on the association website, effective with our upcoming winter tournament season.

Basketball Revenue Sharing: 2017 Tournament

The State Basketball Committee is appreciative for the support of the MIAA Board of Directors in continuing the Basketball Revenue Sharing Program as utilized with last year’s tournament. Once again, revenue sharing will begin with sectional quarter-final games, with earlier round games the responsibility of host schools. We are pleased to recognize that this adjustment resulted in a state-wide net gain of well over $100,000 for our membership.

Endowment Games

All schools are reminded that our MIAA Endowment Game Program, in support of the newly implemented Endowment Fund, is an ideal way to schedule and play an additional game without the concern of impacting your seasonal record or tournament qualification. It is great to see a number of basketball Endowment Games already approved for the coming season.

Please feel free to contact our office (Jim Peters, Phil Vaccaro, or Michele Blackburn) if you have any Endowment Game questions.

Game Exclusion Process

Athletic Directors and coaches are reminded that the scheduling of any Exclusion Game, where your school DOES NOT WISH to count the game for tournament qualification and seeding, must complete and forward the Game Exclusion Notice “BEFORE THE FIRST ALLOWABLE DATE FOR COMPETITION IN THAT SPORT”. Thus, the deadline date for submitting these forms is, December 8th.

Basketball Awards Programs

Our sport of MIAA Basketball continues to promote and celebrate two significant awards programs, one recognizing our student-athletes and teams while the other honors an adult contributor to our great game. Please consider nominations to these initiatives:
Summary of Awards and Information:

- **Sherman A. Kinney Award**: “For outstanding contributions to the sport of high school basketball”. This award is presented annually as part of the state basketball tournament festivities. The nomination information is available on our website (Hot Topics) with a deadline date of 3 February 2017.

- **Boys’ and Girls’ Basketball Team Sportsmanship Awards**: Presented to one team per division for displaying the highest degree of sportsmanship. These awards are presented to each school during our state finals activities. The nomination form is part of the Sport Specific Information (Format), with the nomination deadline of 17 February 2017.

**Use of Electronic Scorebooks**

We are aware of various options available for the utilization of technology/IPAD apps for electronic basketball scoring. Should schools and/or leagues consider their use, the MIAA recommends them as a “secondary book” in the 2016-17 regular season, with the requirement to also continue with the official hard copy scorebook. Tournament play will require the traditional scorebook. Future considerations for official electronic scoring can be reviewed by our State Committee.

**Massachusetts Basketball Coaches Association**

The State Committee applauds all the great work performed by the MBCA in improving and promoting MIAA high school basketball. Their annual efforts include conducting coaches’ clinics, hosting a Hall of Fame Induction Banquet, leading a state-wide foul shooting contest, and presenting yearly player and coach awards. The MIAA is happy to provide this link ([Click Here](#)) to the MBCA Fall Newsletter. We encourage our member schools to consider the School Membership Discount Package outlined on page one of their publication. For additional information, please take a look at the MBCA website at mbcaorg.net.

**Wishing all our schools a successful 2016-2017 season**

**Let the Games Begin!!**