

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE  
HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS



**NEWS RELEASE**

**Assisting Injured Athletes, Expansion of Exchange Zones Among  
Rules Changes in Track and Field/Cross Country**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Julie Cochran

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (3/8/2020) — The expansion of exchange zones in short relay events, which does not require tracks to be repainted/resurfaced, as well as assisting injured athletes, are among the rules changes for high school track and field and cross country.

Seven rules changes were recommended by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Track and Field and Cross Country Rules Committee at its June 10-12 meeting in Indianapolis, and all changes were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

The first change amends notes in Rule 4 (Competitors and Competition) and Rule 8 (Cross Country) which reads, “A competitor who provides assistance to an injured or ill competitor should not be disqualified if neither the individual competitor providing the assistance nor his/her team gains an advantage as a result of providing the assistance.”

“Previous changes to the NFHS rules created the exception that allows a competitor to assist an injured or ill competitor without being disqualified when medical staff is not present,” said Julie Cochran, NFHS director of sports and liaison to the Track and Field/Cross Country Rules Committee. “In a clear majority of these types of situations, the action is intended to be an act of good sportsmanship and not an attempt to circumvent the rules or gain an advantage.”

While the injured or ill competitor is disqualified for receiving help, the competitor helping will not be disqualified, unless that competitor – or his/her team – gains an advantage. In all cases, the final decision rests with the meet referee, who has the sole authority to rule on infractions, irregularities and disqualifications in a meet.

Changes to Rules 5-3-3 and 5-3-4 expand the exchange zone in relays with legs of 200 meters or less from 20 to 30 meters. All exchange zones for races with legs longer than 200 meters will remain at 20 meters.

“The acceleration zone is now incorporated into the existing exchange zone, thus a 30-meter exchange zone for relay races with legs of 200 meters or less,” Cochran said. “The rule change does not require that tracks be repainted or resurfaced in order to follow the new NFHS rules. Existing acceleration zone markings, such as triangles, squares or colored tape, placed at that location may be used to denote the beginning of the exchange zones on a track.”

Rule 6-2-6 has been amended to prohibit athletes from running backwards or in the opposite direction (non-legal direction) during warm-ups on horizontal jumps, pole vault and javelin runways.

“This change promotes a more organized and efficient warm-up period,” Cochran said. “Competitors should now be more aware of their surroundings.”

Two changes to Rule 6 provide equivalent metric increments for tiebreaking jump-offs in vertical jumps, as well as clarify distance requirements for long jump and triple jump pits. For long jump and triple jump pits constructed after 2019, the length of the pit shall be at least 23 feet (seven meters).

In cross country, Rule 8-1-1 has been reorganized to clarify that a cross country course may be marked with any or all methods listed in the rule.

An additional change to cross country rules adds language to Rule 8-1-3 regarding straightaways at the start of a course. The change provides a recommended minimum distance of 100 meters for beginning straightaways, and states that no narrow section of a course should be longer than 10 feet (three meters) long. Small cones of the appropriate color, at least 12 inches (30 centimeters) high, are also now permitted to be used in lieu of painted lines or survey chalk.

According to the 2017-18 NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey, track and field is the most popular sport for girls with 488,592 participants and is No. 2 for boys with 600,097. Cross country ranks sixth for girls with 223,518 participants and sixth for boys with 270,095.

A complete listing of the track and field and cross country rules changes will be available on the NFHS website at [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org). Click on “Activities & Sports” at the top of the home page and select “Track and Field/Cross Country.”

*This press release was written by Luke Modrovsky, a 2019 summer intern in the NFHS Publications/Communications Department. He is a senior sports management and communication studies student at Wilkes University in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.*

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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 more than 7.9 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](http://www.nfhs.org).

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