

ATHOL HIGH SCHOOL
ATHOL-ROYALSTON MIDDLE SCHOOL
Student Athletic Handbook
2019-2020

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this handbook is to introduce to student/athletes and their parent/guardians the philosophy behind our program and the regulations and policies which govern it. Although this handbook cannot include every policy and rule which applies to athletes, the most critical and fundamental rules are contained within.

It is our expectation that parents and students will read this handbook in a thorough manner. In this way, misunderstandings about our rules may be avoided.

After having read the handbook, parent and students are required to sign the Athletic Participation Form that is required before the start of each season. Students who return this completed form have provided us with the indication that they understand and will abide by all policies and rules of the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, our league and Athol High School.

PHILOSOPHY

The Athol High School and Athol-Royalston Middle School Interscholastic athletic programs are integral parts of the total school program. Interscholastic athletics provides the “other half” of education. The overall goals of this program fall under the philosophy, goals, and objectives of the educational system. The program demands a strong commitment to academics first, before participation takes place on our teams. The interscholastic athletic program provides for constructive physical, mental, moral, emotional, social growth and character development. Healthy physical activity is essential to everyday living and participation in interscholastic athletics helps to establish a disciplined life and qualities associated with successful adulthood.

Successful competitive performance in combination with educational considerations provides the cornerstone for our athletic program. All athletes are given fair opportunity to demonstrate their skill levels and made to feel they are part of a team. The young man or woman who learns to cope with victory and defeat; to accept frustrations and disappointments as well as success; to spend long hours in practice with no guarantee that they will get in the game; to accept discipline and to work with fellow athletes, has learned about things that cannot be taught in the classroom.

OBJECTIVES

Provide opportunities for students to learn to cope with problems and handle situations similar to those of everyday living.

Provide opportunities for physical, mental, and emotional growth.

Provide opportunities to develop skills in the activities of each student’s choice.

Provide opportunities to develop and understand the concepts of individual and team play.

Develop a sense of commitment, loyalty, cooperation, and fairness.

Generate the feeling of unity throughout the community.

Create a healthy competitive atmosphere and an attitude of good sportsmanship that stresses winning and losing with grace and dignity.

Develop the opportunity to practice self-discipline and emotional maturity in learning to make decisions under pressure.

Strive for playing excellence.

Provide the opportunity to learn to enjoy the use of leisure time constructively both now and in the future.

Provide the opportunity for students to develop confidence and self-esteem.

Provide the opportunity for students to effectively manage time.

ADMINISTRATIVE FLOWCHART

Level 1: Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA)

The MIAA is the governing body of athletics within the State of Massachusetts. Its Board of Directors is made up of Principals from the various districts throughout the State. The Board of Directors and its various subcommittees establish policy for all member schools.

Level 2: Pioneer Valley Interscholastic Athletic Conference (PVIAC)

The PVIAC is an athletic conference in the Pioneer Valley that is made up of a group of forty-two high schools who have organized for the purpose of establishing rules and guidelines to create fair and equitable competition among member schools in all sports. The PVIAC follows all rules and regulations of the MIAA.

Level 3: Local School Committee

The School Committee is the governing body for Athol High School. It sets all policy within the school district relative to athletics.

Level 4: Superintendent of Schools

The Superintendent of Schools administers school policy relative to athletics as established by the School Committee. The Superintendent is responsible for the establishment of the school's athletic policy.

Level 5: Principal

The Principal is the official representative of the school and is directly responsible for the total conduct of all athletic affairs of the school. The principal is the official school representative in matters dealing with the MIAA and the PVIAC. He/she insures that all MIAA guidelines and policies are followed. The principal is responsible for any official action taken by the school. The Assistant Principal is responsible for all of the principal's responsibilities in his/her absence.

Level 6: Athletic Director

The Athletic Director is directly responsible to the Principal. He/she is responsible for the supervision and administration of the entire interscholastic athletic program. He/she provides the leadership necessary for the daily operation of the athletic department. The athletic director is responsible for carrying out and enforcing all school committee, high school, PVIAC, and MIAA rules and guidelines. He/she is responsible for the direct supervision and evaluation of all coaches.

Level 7: Head Coaches

Head coaches are responsible to the Athletic Director and are responsible for the total operation of their respective sports program. Head coaches shall act as official representatives of the school as they carry out their interscholastic athletic responsibilities at practices, games, league meetings, and the like.

Level 8: Assistant Coaches/Middle School Coaches

Assistant coaches are directly responsible to the head coach. They are responsible for helping the head coach with the daily responsibility of teaching student athletes, supervision, and coaching of junior varsity teams. They are responsible for carrying out the instruction of offensive and defensive strategies and philosophy as set forth by the head coach.

THE ATHLETIC PROGRAM

The Athol High School Athletic Program strives to offer a comprehensive set of sports teams at as many levels as participation and funding will support. From year to year, some sports or levels of play may not be available due to low levels of participation or because of lack of funding.

FALL	WINTER	SPRING
Boys Soccer - Varsity, JV, MS Cheerleading – Varsity, MS Field Hockey - Varsity, JV Football - Varsity, JV, MS Girls Soccer - Varsity, JV, MS Girls Volleyball - Varsity, JV	Boys Basketball - Varsity, JV, MS Boys Indoor Track - Varsity Cheerleading – Varsity, MS Girls Basketball - Varsity, JV, MS Girls Indoor Track - Varsity **Ice Hockey - Varsity, JV Wrestling - Varsity, JV	Baseball - Varsity, JV, MS Boys Volleyball - Varsity, JV Boys Track & Field – Varsity Girls Track & Field – Varsity Softball - Varsity, JV, MS

COMMUNICATION

There are going to be questions and issues regarding all sports. From time to time, students and parents will want to discuss these issues with school officials. It is expected that the following line of communication will be used. Every effort should be made to resolve all issues at the lowest possible level.

1. Coach
2. Athletic Director
3. Principal
4. Superintendent

AWARDS FOR ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION

Each team will hold an awards banquet at the completion of their season. All athletes are expected to attend their sport awards banquet.

Certificates

Certificates will be awarded to every student athlete and manager who completes the season (every sport, every season), that does not qualify for numerals, letter or pin.

Numerals

Numerals, the last two digits of the student's year of graduation, are given to each student at the completion of their first season of any sport at the Junior Varsity or Varsity level. These are only issued once to each student while participating in athletics at AHS.

Letters

Letters will be awarded to all varsity athletes who meet the specific criteria established by the coach in that specific sport. Only one varsity letter will be awarded to any athlete in the specific sport while competing at the varsity level.

Pins

Sport-specific pins will be awarded to all athletes who meet the criteria for a varsity letter for the second time in any sport. Captain's pins are awarded to the varsity captains.

Senior Plaques (Contingent on available funds from ARAA)

Any senior who letters in a varsity sport during their years at AHS will receive a Senior Plaque. (Seniors must attend the Senior Letter Winners Banquet in order to receive the Senior Plaque)

Middle School

First year of participation on a particular sport, the student athlete will earn a middle school letter in that sport. Any subsequent season in that particular sport, the student athlete will earn a gold pin.

RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR ALL STUDENT ATHLETES**Physical Examinations**

Students must pass a physical examination within 13 months of participation in any sport. If a physical expires during the season of play, the athlete will not be allowed to participate in either practices or games until a valid physical has been received. The school physician is available to give physicals at no charge to the students at specifically designated times. If students choose not to receive a physical from the school physician, students will be responsible for their own physical from their family physician prior to participation. Each student must have a copy of a valid physical on file with the school.

Parental/Guardian Permission

All students must have written parental permission in order to participate in any athletic program unless the student is eighteen years old. Eighteen year old students do not require permission of their parent(s)/Guardian(s).

Student Eligibility

All students must meet all school and MIAA eligibility requirements.

Length of Eligibility

Students are eligible for athletics for 12 consecutive seasons beginning with their entry into the ninth grade.

Nineteen Year Old Student Non-Participation Rule

Students who are 19 years old prior to September 1 of their senior year are not eligible for high school athletics.

Transfer Student Eligibility

Students who transfer from another high school are ineligible to participate in sports if:

- They participated at the varsity level in a sport in which they intend to play at Athol High School
- The parents of transfer students do not change residence
- Students transfer after the start of the practice season during that sport season
- Transfer students who have played in the preceding year at the varsity level at another high school or its equivalent are ineligible for one year from the date of transfer.

A waiver request is available for transfer students with special circumstances. The parents of all transfer students who intend to participate in athletics should contact the Athletic Director immediately upon considering a transfer to Athol High School.

Academic Eligibility and Social Probation for Athol High School

To be eligible for participation, for the fall season, students must have passed at least 5 credits from the previous school year.

Students on social probation are not eligible for interscholastic athletics.

For Terms 1, 2 & 3 students must receive passing grades in 5 of 6 classes in any marking period or they will be placed on academic probation. Students will remain on social probation until the end of next marking period. **Incompletes do not count as passing grades.** Students on social probation due to incompletes may be removed from social probation if they obtain the minimum number of passing grades once incomplete work is completed.

Students on social probation may seek an Academic Success Plan from the Principal. A student who is on an Academic Success Plan, and meets the conditions of that plan, may practice with the team (however, they are NOT eligible to participate in a contest until the next report card is issued).

Students may also be placed on social probation for disciplinary reasons at the discretion of the school administration.

When Eligibility is Determined

Student eligibility will be determined on the day report cards are issued, not before.

User Fees (\$25.00 per sport)

The school committee will establish user fees from time to time. User fees will be used to help fund the total athletic program (i.e. transportation, officials, uniforms, equipment, and the like). The payment of user fees does not guarantee playing time. This fee must be paid prior to the first contest in that sport. Students may drop out prior to the first contest without being responsible for the user fee. Students will be responsible for payment of the user fee if they continue to participate beyond the first contest.

Families in financial need may request a waiver from the user fee. However, written documentation requesting the waiver must be submitted to the athletic director.

Waivers will be granted under the following criteria:

- a. Eligibility for free or reduced lunch.
- b. Extenuating family circumstances.

Changing Teams or Late Participation

Changing teams or coming out for a team after the first ten days of the season will not be permitted unless there are extenuating circumstances. The Principal and the Athletic Director will collectively decide on issues regarding participation after the first ten days of the season.

Suspension/Removal from Team

The school administration reserves the authority to preclude students from participating in school events, which include Athletics. The principal reserves the authority to remove any student from a team, club, activity, leadership position for failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, represent the school appropriately or failure to comply with expectations of the team or organization.

Players Attendance

As a member of an athletic program, a student is expected to be at all practices and prepared for all games unless properly excused by a parent/coach. It is expected that the player/parent communicate with the coach if the player is going to be absent from practice/game.

It is required that all athletes attend the preseason meeting and the end of the season team banquet

Vacations during Season

Any student who chooses to go on a vacation during any portion of an athletic season, other than on a family trip or school endorsed trip will forfeit his/her status on that team for the remainder of said season unless otherwise approved by administration.

A student who has been away for 3 consecutive practices/games will not play until having participated in at least one team function; has been away for 4 or more consecutive practices/games will not play for until having participated in at least two consecutive team functions.

Hazing

Massachusetts State Law prohibits hazing of any type. Hazing will be handled according to the school discipline code.

Bullying

Massachusetts State Law prohibits Bullying of any type. Bullying will be handled according to the school discipline code.

Taunting (MIAA Rule 48)

Taunting includes any actions or comments by coaches, players, or spectators that are intended to bait, anger, embarrass, ridicule or demean others. Included is conduct that berates, needles, intimidates or threatens based on race, gender, ethnic origin or background, and/or conduct that attacks religious beliefs, size, economic status, speech, family, special needs or personal matters.

Examples of taunting include but are not limited to: "trash talk", defined as verbal communication of a personal nature directed by a competitor to an opponent by ridiculing his/her skill efforts, sexual orientation, or lack of success, which is likely to provoke an altercation or physical response; and physical intimidation outside the spirit of the game, including "in the face" confrontation by one player to another and standing over/straddling a tackled or fallen player.

In all sports, officials are to consider taunting a flagrant unsportsmanlike foul that disqualifies the offending bench personnel or contestant from that contest/day of competition. In addition, the offender shall be subject to existing MIAA expulsion rules. Game officials will give a warning to both teams prior to the contest.

At all MIAA contest sites and tournament venues, appropriate management may give spectators one warning for taunting.

Thereafter, spectators who taunt players, coaches, game officials, or other spectators are subject to ejection.

Chemical Health (MIAA Rule 62)

Student Eligibility: Chemical Health/Alcohol/Drugs/Tobacco

From the earliest fall practice date, to the conclusion of the academic year or final athletic event (whichever is latest), as student shall not, regardless of the quantity, use, consume, possess, buy/sell, or give away any beverage containing alcohol; any tobacco product; marijuana; steroids; or any controlled substance. This policy includes products such as "NA or near beer". It is not a violation for a student to be in possession of a legally defined drug specifically prescribed for the student's own use by his/her doctor.

This MIAA statewide minimum standard is not intended to render "guilt by association", e.g. many student athletes might be present at a party where only a few violate this standard. This rule represents only a minimum standard upon which schools may develop more stringent requirements.

If a student in violation of this rule is unable to participate in interscholastic sports due to injury or academics, the penalty will not take effect until that student is able to participate again.

Minimum PENALTIES:

First violation: When the Principal confirms, following an opportunity for the student to be heard, that a violation occurred, the student shall lose eligibility for the next consecutive interscholastic contests totaling 25% of all interscholastic contests in that sport. For the student, these penalties will be determined by the season the violation occurs. No exception is permitted for a student who becomes a participant in a treatment program. It is recommend rehabilitation. All decimal part of an event will be truncated i.e. All fractional part of an event will be dropped when calculating the 25% of the season.

Second and subsequent violations: When the Principal confirms, following an opportunity for the student to be heard, that a violation occurred, the student shall lose eligibility for the next consecutive interscholastic contests totaling 60% of all interscholastic contests in that sport. For the student, these penalties will be determined by the season the violation occurs. All decimal part of an event will be truncated i.e. All fractional part of an event will be dropped when calculating the 60% of the season. If after the second or subsequent violations the student of his/her own volition becomes a participant in an approved chemical dependency program or treatment program, the student may be certified for reinstatement in MIAA activities after a minimum of 40% of events. The director or a counselor of a chemical dependency treatment center must issue such certification. All decimal part of an event will be truncated i.e. All fractional part of an event will be dropped when calculating the 40% of the season. Penalties shall be cumulative each academic year. If the penalty period is not completed during the season of violation, the penalty shall carry over to the student's next season of actual participation, which may affect the eligibility status of the student during the next academic year.

1st Offense - 25%	
# of Events / Season	# of Events / Penalty
1-7	1
8-11	2

12-15	3
16-19	4
20 or over	5

2nd Offense - 60%	
# of Events / Season	# of Events / Penalty
1-3	1
4	2
5-6	3
7-8	4
9	5
10-11	6
12-13	7
14	8
15-16	9
17-18	10
19	11
20 or over	12

2nd Offense w/Dependency Program - 40% if in the program throughout the penalty period.	
# of Events / Season	# of Events / Penalty
1-4	1
5-7	2
8-9	3
10-12	4
13-14	5
15-17	6
18-19	7
20 or over	8

Steroid Use - Anabolic androgenic steroid use at the high school level is of grave concern. Steroids are used by some athletes, and the seriousness of the problem has been well documented. High school coaches may not be able to prevent the use of steroids altogether, but they can clearly and forcefully discourage their use. Coaches should take a proactive role, learning about steroids, and then providing this information to their athletes.

Steroids can, with proper diet and weight training, increase muscle development; however, as is typical with most "get-rich-quick" schemes, steroid use has serious short and long term consequences.

Normal and equal musculature development can occur without steroid use. Although the natural process takes longer, muscle tone will last longer and does not carry the harmful side effects of steroids.

Most coaches would not promote steroid use intentionally. Total silences by Coaches however condone use in some young people's minds. Even though Steroids may not be mentioned when it is suggested to an athlete that his/her Success is limited only by a lack of weight and/or strength, without a disclaimer the statement can be a motivation to use steroids. The pervasiveness of the drugs that allow for development of increased weight under the aforementioned circumstances is a coercive power that is difficult for young athletes to resist without knowing what the side effects of the drugs may be.

The issue goes beyond protecting the integrity of sport. The use of steroids in sports is cheating. We must oppose the use of steroids for both health and ethical reasons.

Tournament Participation/Bona Fide Team Members (MIAA Rule 45 and 96)

A Bona Fide team member of a school team is a student who is consistently present for, and actively participates in, all high school team sessions (e.g. practices, tryouts, competitions). Bona fide members of a school team are precluded from missing a high school practice or competition in order to participate in a non-school athletic activity/event in any sport recognized by the MIAA.

First Offense: Student athlete is suspended for 25% of the season (see chart on Rule 62).

Second Offense: Student athlete is suspended an additional 25% of the season, and is ineligible for tournament play immediately upon confirmation of the violation.

Athol High School may seek a waiver for this rule through the MIAA under Rule 86 by submitting an acceptable request 30 days prior to the event.

School Suspensions (MIAA Good Citizen Rule 63)

Any student suspended from school may not practice, play or be with the team on the day(s) in which they are serving the suspension.

MIAA Suspensions

Any student suspended under MIAA rules will not be allowed to dress in his/her team uniform, for any reason, during their suspension.

School Attendance

To participate in a school activity, a student must be present on the day of the activity, and if the activity is on a non school day, he/she must be present in school the preceding day.

Students must be in school half the day (regular school day by 10:50AM to be eligible for interscholastic/extra-curricular activities for that day.

Administrative exceptions may be given for medical, funeral services and legal excuses if a note is provided to the Principal.

Transportation

The Athletic Department will provide transportation to away games. Parents are responsible for providing transportation to all home games.

All team members are required to travel to and from all away events using transportation provided by the athletic department. In the event of an emergency or family matter, the parent must communicate to the coach for accountability purposes. When possible, a written request should be provided to the coach for documentation.

Under no circumstances will students be allowed to transport themselves or ride with other students to or from away games.

In the event of a medical emergency, it will be the coach's responsibility to arrange emergency transportation for medical services to the local hospital. Whenever possible, coaches should use EMS transportation rather than personal vehicles or vehicles of other parents or spectators. The coach will work in conjunction with the parents if they are present.

Equipment

Team members are absolutely responsible for equipment issued to them and must return equipment promptly at the coaches' request. All equipment must be accounted for before an athlete is eligible for an award, graduation or further participation in athletics. Athletes who have been found to have stolen equipment may be billed for that item along with suspension from further athletic participation and from school for a period to be determined by the administration.

Captain's Practices

Captain's practices are not sponsored or authorized by Athol High School. Once in season, no practices are to be conducted without adult supervision.

Season Limits

The fall season must not begin before the Monday preceding Labor Day for all fall sports (except as specified for football). The fall season must end with completion of the regular season schedule except for the varsity team or individual students completing their participation in any MIAA tournaments.

Winter season will begin on the Monday after Thanksgiving and conclude on the last scheduled dual competition unless teams qualify for post-season competition.

Spring season begins on the third Monday in March and concludes with the last scheduled dual competition unless teams qualify for post-season competition.

The Cut Process

Throughout the year, a team may have more students try out than can be reasonably kept on the team. Justification for cutting students from a team includes but is not limited to:

- Maintaining a safe player/coach ratio.
- Maintaining a number of students that will be able to get fair playing time.
- Maintaining appropriate skill level for the competition

In all cases where it is necessary to cut students from a team, the coach will establish fair and reasonable criteria for keeping students on the team. His/her decision will be final. In all cases, every effort will be made to keep as many players as possible.

Playing time

There is a difference in philosophy between varsity, junior varsity and middle school with regard to playing time.

Junior Varsity/Middle School

This is a developmental level where students learn skills and prepare for varsity competition. It is expected that skills and strategies of the game will be taught and emphasized. It is also expected that all players will be given a fair and equitable opportunity to play in competition to develop their potential and to demonstrate their readiness for varsity level competition. However, participation will be based on commitment, desire, attitude, respect for others, and attendance at practice, sportsmanship, and skill level. At all times, safety will be the first priority.

Varsity

This level of athletics should represent the best Athol High School has to offer for competition against other schools. There is a greater emphasis upon winning. Participation will be based on demonstrated skills and strategies of the game, along with attitude, attendance, commitment to the program, and sportsmanship. The varsity coach will make all decisions regarding playing time. At all times, safety will be the first priority.