

REVELATION

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OPINION

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WEEKENDER

Dividing Mississippi Where Will We Land: MAIS or MHSAA?

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66% of you voted to be in the MHSAA

34% of you voted to be in the MAIS

To be or not to be – in the MHSAA or the MAIS – that is the question.

Currently, St. Andrew's is affiliated with the MHSAA, the Mississippi High School Athletics Association. The MHSAA is a group composed of all of the public schools in Mississippi. This athletics association is broken down into divisions based on the size of each school. 1A, 2A, and 3A include the smaller schools like us, and 4A, 5A, and 6A include the bigger schools like Madison Central and Germantown. The MAIS, Mississippi Association of Independent Schools, is composed of all of the private schools in Mississippi. Recently, there have been rumors circulating around St. Andrew's concerning the possibility of the school switching sports associations.

"This past fall, the 1.5 rule was vetoed and, thereby, not implemented due to the 18 to 17 vote that occurred at this MHSAA meeting," Athletics Director DeWayne Cupples said. "If this topic comes up again at one of our meetings, then there will be another vote held to see if the division sizes need to be changed for the independent schools within the MHSAA. If this 1.5 rule ends up being implemented in the future, we will probably need to switch to the MAIS for safety reasons because the bigger schools in class 4A, the division size which we would be propelled into if the 1.5 rule passed, will naturally have better athletes just due to their number of students to choose from for teams. St. Andrew's and other private/independent schools in the MHSAA would be so dramatically affected by this rule because none of the public schools like Germantown, Pearl, Madison Central, Northwest Rankin, etc. would have to change their division size. Our athletes would be much more likely to receive serious injuries playing teams like the ones currently in 4A. For now, though, I like staying in the MHSAA because the competition is better, and that pushes our athletes."

As Cupples explained, the public schools that comprise the majority of the schools in the MHSAA wanted compensation for the fact that students had to be zoned to their schools (i.e. people living in Madison have to go to Madison Central), but students attending private schools are not zoned to certain schools, which, according to public school officials, interferes with the number of potential student athletes they could have from their specific zone. Some public school officials feel like they are being cheated from attaining the maximum number of athletes within their school zone, so they think that every student at each private school that is a part of the MHSAA should be accounted for as 1.5 students rather than just 1.

"Absolutely, the MHSAA has some problems and some of their decisions do not always make sense, but it is still the major sports association in the state of Mississippi," Baseball Coach Mark Fanning said. "One of the advantages of being at St. Andrew's is the ability to play and compete with a wide range of schools throughout the state. St. Andrew's has won many state championships throughout the years in various sports and has remained a strong member of the MHSAA."

Some student athlete find that maybe St. Andrew's should participate in a different size division or in a different sports association completely, and other students share differing opinions about the possible impact of a change from the MHSAA to the MAIS.

"Altogether, it would just make more sense if all of the private schools were together and all of the public schools were together," Phoebe Xu said. "This separation of the school types would prevent arguments such as these from occurring where the number of people attending private schools interferes with the number of students and, thereby, the number of talent within each public school zone. I think that we should be in the MAIS because we are an independent school, basically a private school, and so we should play against other teams similar to us."

Fletcher Clark also agrees with Xu about the benefits of the switch to the MAIS but for different reasons.

"Each sport would be affected differently if we switched to the MAIS, but all together, I think we should switch to the MAIS because the MHSAA limits athletes by making certain sports like basketball and soccer in the same season, forcing athletes to choose between the two sports rather than allowing them to pursue what they truly love," Clark said.

Other students and coaches counter what Cupples said about the MHSAA having better competition and, thereby, benefiting athletes to work harder.

"I have mixed feeling about a move to the MAIS," Cheerleading and Girls' Soccer Coach Erik Snyder said. "The MAIS is a much smaller league. We would be one of the largest schools in MAIS, and I don't believe we would have the same success in that league. I'm not saying tough competition is bad. I ask: is it safe?"

While many argue that the competition is a serious issue concerning St. Andrew's sports association affiliation, these arguments are all specific to each sport. Some sports may benefit from the switch, and some may not contend well; this problem still exists in the MHSAA though. There are other reasons, however, that several people are against switching to the MAIS.

"I am not in favor of moving," Girls' Basketball Coach Burney King said. "I think the MHSAA is a better situation for our school. There are pros and cons for both leagues, but I like the availability of a lot of different opponents that you do not have in the MAIS. There is simply not a lot of teams."

So, what's the truth about why St. Andrew's should not be in the MAIS – is it too tough, or is it too easy? For this question to be answered, it seems one must go to the students who have experienced both sports associations themselves, having gone to private schools in previous years before attending St. Andrew's.

"The good thing about being in the MHSAA is that the same school doesn't win every year because that gets really boring playing the same teams over and over again," Madison Klein said.

Brooks Lacoste, who also attended a private school in the MAIS for several years, brings up an alternative argument supporting the MAIS.

"Back in the starting days of St. Andrew's, the administrators of the school wanted to be a part of the MHSAA to enhance a diverse community and avoid the segregation involved in the private schools of the MAIS," Lacoste said. "However, integration has occurred in every school, private and public, now, and, thus, being a part of the MAIS would not deter us from nurturing this diverse community that is so important to St. Andrew's. Switching to the MAIS is not a matter of social issues but of athletes' enjoyment of their high school experiences. The MAIS, which enhances competitiveness through competition, would make current SA student athletes happier by allowing them to pursue more than one sport per season and compete against athletes of other independent schools like us. With allowing more participation in different sporting events, switching to the MAIS would allow St. Andrew's to have more participants in sports and, thereby, would allow us to have a stronger sports program as a whole, which would attract more students to come to the school. St. Andrew's is already a great school for so many reasons, but with a stronger sports program, it would become an even better and more unique school, which fosters all aspects of education because athletics do educate and benefit youths in several ways that academics can not."

Considering all of the different viewpoints, a final consensus may be hard to make, and the divide between the opinions of coaches and students creates a struggle for a majority belief on this issue. Problems will always exist in each sports association because of the two different types of schools in the state. Thereby, there is no precise answer to resolve this argument, but these differences in opinions do not delay the possible inevitability of the school's switch to the MAIS in the near future.