Prompt Inquiry
a project of the Ishmael Policy Institute

WORKING PAPER NO. 2026-07 LEGACY SPORTS AND INSTITUTIONS

# Missouri's Top High School Boys' Programs

Every top-division state finish in ten boys sports, from each sport's first Missouri championship through the 2025–26 school year, scored four points for a title down to one for fourth. One program has almost twice the points of any other.

RESEARCH QUESTION

**Which Missouri boys' high school programs have been the most successful in the top division across ten sports, and did the state's playoff brackets around 2000 favor some regions over others?**

Prompted and verified by **Patrick Ishmael**, Founding Prompter, for Prompt Inquiry, a project of the Ishmael Policy Institute. Drafted with AI assistance (Claude and Mia) under the prompter's direction.

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

# Research brief

### RESEARCH QUESTION

Which Missouri boys' high school programs have been the most successful in the top division across ten sports, and did the state's playoff brackets around 2000 favor some regions over others?

### METHOD AND SOURCES

The study's "How the totals were built" section explains the scoring and sources; "What this study could not settle" lists the gaps. Sources are listed in full, with links where available, at the end of the study.

### STARTING VIEW

Not recorded. This is a legacy study; see the note under Disclosures.

### OPENING PROMPT

Not saved as a prompt at the time. The study's own account of how it started gives the question: "Patrick asked which Missouri high schools have had the most successful boys athletic programs at the top level of competition, and set the rules: ten sports, top division only, and points for the top four finishes so that consistency counts but titles still show. He also asked whether the way the state bracket was drawn favored some regions"

### AI TOOLS AND VERIFICATION

**Primary agents. Claude** (Claude by Anthropic): research, analysis, figures and drafting; **Mia** (Muse by Meta): research brief, coordination and checks.

**Contributing agents.** None on record for this study.

**Verification:** the prompter is responsible for verifying the evidence this study rests on. Its sources and data are published so any reader can check the findings.

**HOW THIS STARTED**

Patrick asked which Missouri high schools have had the most successful boys athletic programs at the top level of competition, and set the rules: ten sports, top division only, and points for the top four finishes so that consistency counts but titles still show. He also asked whether the way the state bracket was drawn favored some regions, a point of contention when he was at Rockhurst from 1998 to 2002. Rockhurst is his school, and it finishes first here. The scoring rules were fixed before the totals were run.

**HOW THIS STUDY WAS MADE**

Patrick Ishmael prompted this study and verified it. Claude drafted it and ran the analysis under his direction. The championship records were gathered from the Missouri State High School Activities Association's public history pages by Mia, an AI agent, as text copied from a browser. Claude parsed them, checked a sample of about 110 championships across nine sports against MSHSAA's live pages, and found no differences. Mia re-read the tenth, soccer, and it matched. Where the record is missing or unclear, the page says so under "What this study could not settle."

## The question

Missouri's high school sports are run by the Missouri State High School Activities Association, which has crowned state champions since the 1920s. Schools compete in classes by enrollment, so a small rural school does not play in the same tournament as a large suburban one. This study looks only at the top class in each sport: the largest schools, where a state title means beating the biggest programs in Missouri. How many classes there are, and so how large the top class is, has changed over time and differs from sport to sport.

Patrick asked two questions. First, which boys' programs have been the most successful at that level across ten sports: football, basketball, baseball, soccer, wrestling, track and field, cross-country, swimming and diving, tennis and golf? Second, did the way the state drew its playoff brackets around 2000 favor some parts of the state over others?

To answer the first, every top-four state finish earns points: 4 for a title, 3 for second place, 2 for third and 1 for fourth, added up across all ten sports and every year on record. Points reward programs that contend year after year; the title count is shown alongside, so championships still stand out. The page then breaks the totals down by sport and by era, looks at how the brackets were drawn, and finally widens the lens to every class to ask which kinds of schools, by region, size, and public or private, most often finish the job once they reach the final four.

## What we found

Rockhurst has 538 points. The next program, St. Louis University High, has 301. Across 798 top-division championships in ten sports, 203 programs placed in the top four at least once, and no other program is close to the top.

**538** points
Rockhurst's total, from 78 titles, 46 runner-up finishes, 35 thirds and 18 fourths.

**78** titles
Rockhurst again. St. Louis University High is next with 29, then Christian Brothers College with 28 and De Smet Jesuit with 25.

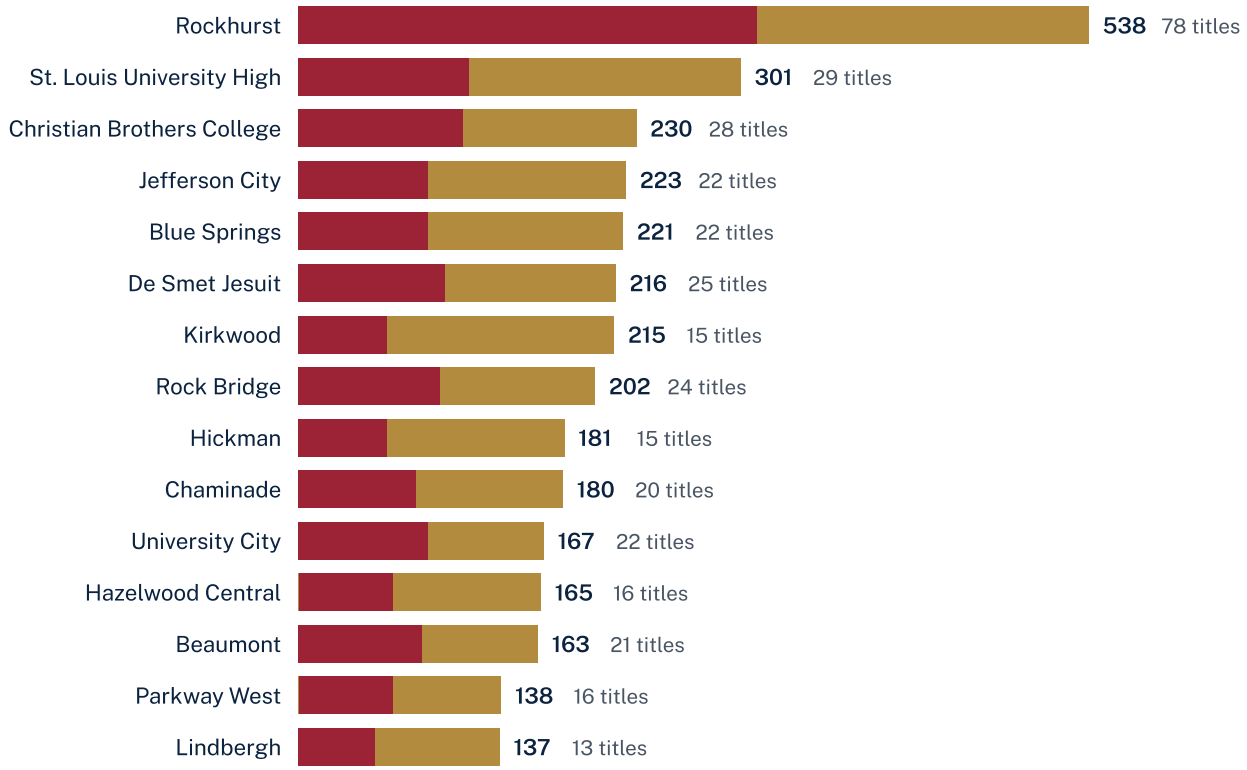
**203** programs
placed in the top four of a top-division championship at least once since 1926.

**5** of 5 brackets
from 1998 to 2002 put St. Louis-area teams in two quarterfinals, Kansas City in one and the rest of the state in one.

FIGURE 1

## The fifteen highest-scoring programs

Total points, all ten sports. The dark part of each bar is points from titles (4 each); the lighter part is points from second, third and fourth.




**Reading it:** Rockhurst's title points alone (312) exceed every other program's total.

### THE TOP THIRTY

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH | WHERE THE POINTS CAME FROM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Rockhurst | 538 | 78 | 46 | 35 | 18 | Tennis 118, Golf 115, Soccer 81 |
| 2 | St. Louis University High | 301 | 29 | 33 | 33 | 20 | Cross-country 61, Soccer 50, Swimming & diving 45 |
| 3 | Christian Brothers College | 230 | 28 | 21 | 23 | 9 | Soccer 71, Basketball 35, Football 34 |
| 4 | Jefferson City | 223 | 22 | 21 | 25 | 22 | Football 64, Golf 39, Track & field 34 |

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH | WHERE THE POINTS CAME FROM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | Blue Springs | 221 | 22 | 21 | 28 | 14 | Wrestling 53, Track & field 38, Football 35 |
| 6 | De Smet Jesuit | 216 | 25 | 21 | 20 | 13 | Soccer 49, Basketball 45, Golf 33 |
| 7 | Kirkwood | 215 | 15 | 24 | 33 | 17 | Track & field 41, Cross-country 32, Wrestling 28 |
| 8 | Rock Bridge | 202 | 24 | 16 | 24 | 10 | Tennis 56, Cross-country 38, Golf 35 |
| 9 | Hickman | 181 | 15 | 20 | 22 | 17 | Swimming & diving 43, Golf 28, Wrestling 24 |
| 10 | Chaminade | 180 | 20 | 19 | 16 | 11 | Golf 45, Swimming & diving 41, Tennis 32 |
| 11 | University City | 167 | 22 | 17 | 9 | 10 | Track & field 107, Wrestling 19, Swimming & diving 14 |
| 12 | Hazelwood Central | 165 | 16 | 19 | 17 | 10 | Football 52, Track & field 28, Baseball 26 |
| 13 | Beaumont | 163 | 21 | 12 | 15 | 13 | Track & field 60, Basketball 33, Cross-country 33 |
| 14 | Parkway West | 138 | 16 | 13 | 13 | 9 | Swimming & diving 60, Cross-country 20, Golf 20 |
| 15 | Lindbergh | 137 | 13 | 13 | 17 | 12 | Tennis 34, Cross-country 30, Swimming & diving 22 |
| 16 | Lafayette (Wildwood) | 136 | 10 | 20 | 12 | 12 | Swimming & diving 33, Baseball 25, Track & field 18 |
| 17 | Normandy | 135 | 14 | 15 | 10 | 14 | Wrestling 70, Golf 20, Swimming & diving 14 |

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH | WHERE THE POINTS CAME FROM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18 | Ritenour | 130 | 21 | 7 | 10 | 5 | Wrestling 93, Track & field 20, Baseball 13 |
| 19 | Liberty | 124 | 15 | 12 | 10 | 8 | Wrestling 32, Cross-country 31, Track & field 17 |
| 20 | Webster Groves | 117 | 12 | 11 | 12 | 12 | Swimming & diving 31, Wrestling 23, Basketball 22 |
| 21 | Parkway Central | 112 | 4 | 16 | 14 | 20 | Swimming & diving 33, Golf 20, Tennis 15 |
| 22 | Oak Park | 107 | 13 | 6 | 16 | 5 | Wrestling 46, Baseball 32, Football 14 |
| 22 | West Plains | 107 | 12 | 13 | 7 | 6 | Cross-country 84, Track & field 10, Baseball 5 |
| 24 | Ladue Horton Watkins | 103 | 11 | 10 | 11 | 7 | Tennis 36, Swimming & diving 33, Golf 15 |
| 25 | Francis Howell | 99 | 9 | 10 | 12 | 9 | Baseball 39, Wrestling 32, Football 7 |
| 26 | Central (Kansas City) | 97 | 13 | 8 | 8 | 5 | Track & field 59, Basketball 30, Cross-country 3 |
| 27 | Park Hill | 89 | 8 | 11 | 9 | 6 | Wrestling 71, Soccer 8, Swimming & diving 5 |
| 28 | Central (St. Joseph) | 87 | 8 | 5 | 16 | 8 | Golf 31, Tennis 27, Track & field 12 |
| 29 | Joplin | 84 | 10 | 10 | 2 | 10 | Basketball 27, Baseball 23, Golf 21 |
| 30 | Raytown South | 80 | 8 | 7 | 10 | 7 | Basketball 28, Cross-country 23, Track & field 16 |

Points: champion 4, runner-up 3, third 2, fourth 1, for each top-division championship in each sport. Programs level on points share a rank. The last column shows each program's three highest-scoring sports.

1 · TITLES

## Counting titles alone gives the same leader

The points system rewards programs that reach the final four often. Counting only championships changes the order below the top but not the top itself.

| PROGRAM | TITLES | POINTS | RANK BY POINTS |
|---|---|---|---|
| Rockhurst | 78 | 538 | 1 |
| St. Louis University High | 29 | 301 | 2 |
| Christian Brothers College | 28 | 230 | 3 |
| De Smet Jesuit | 25 | 216 | 6 |
| Rock Bridge | 24 | 202 | 8 |
| Jefferson City | 22 | 223 | 4 |
| Blue Springs | 22 | 221 | 5 |
| University City | 22 | 167 | 11 |
| Beaumont | 21 | 163 | 13 |
| Ritenour | 21 | 130 | 18 |

2 · BY SPORT

## The leaders in each sport

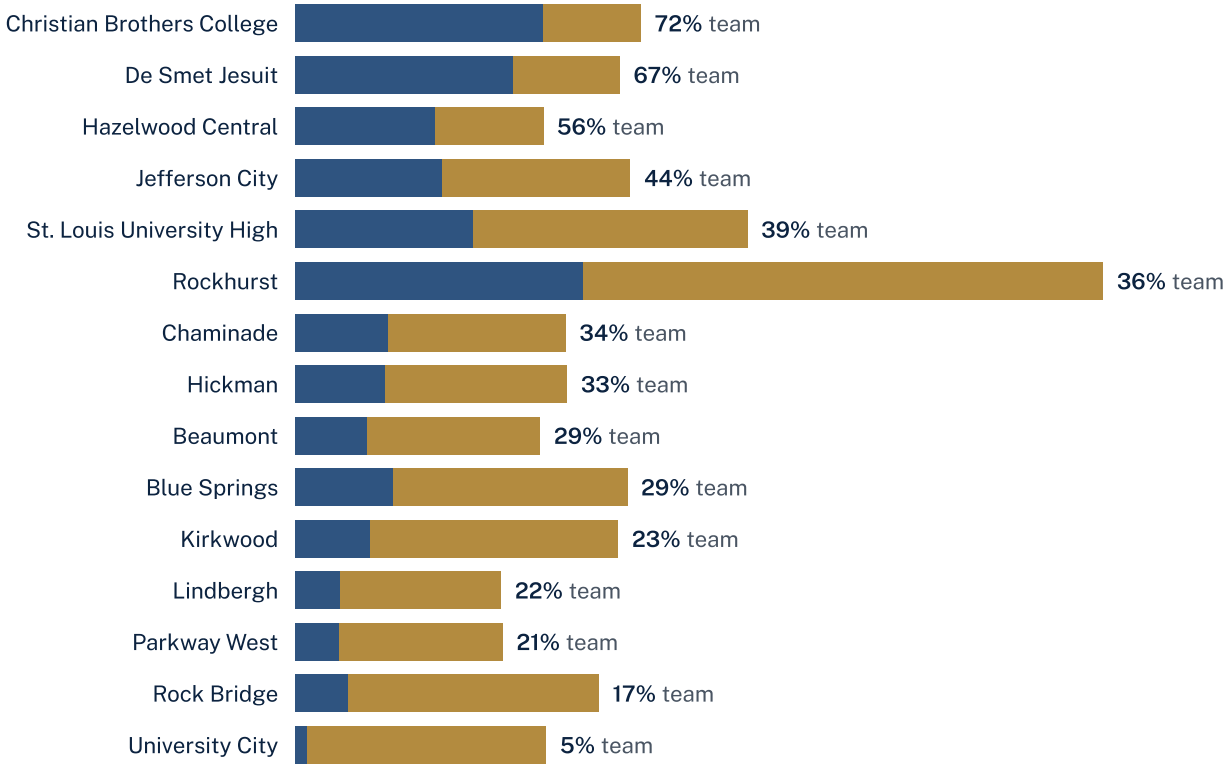
Rockhurst leads 5 of the ten sports on points: football, golf, soccer, swimming & diving, tennis. It has points in nine of the ten; wrestling is the exception.

The leaders built their totals differently. Christian Brothers College (72%) and De Smet Jesuit (67%) earned most of their points in team sports. Rock Bridge (17%) and University City (5%) earned nearly all of theirs in individual sports. Rockhurst leads both halves: 192 points from team sports, ahead of Christian Brothers College with 165, and 346 from individual sports, ahead of St. Louis University High with 183.

FIGURE 2

## Team sports or individual sports

The fifteen highest-scoring programs, ordered from most team-heavy to least. The dark part of each bar is points from the four team sports (football, baseball, basketball, soccer); the lighter part is points from the six individual sports (cross-country, golf, swimming & diving, tennis, track & field, wrestling). The figure at right is the team-sport share.




**Reading it.** Across every program, 36% of all points came from team sports. The six individual sports award more points in total because there are more of them and several have longer histories, so a share above 36% means a program leans toward team sports more than the field does.

SPORT BY SPORT

### **Football** 1968–2025, 58 championships

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Rockhurst | 69 | 9 | 7 | 6 | 0 |
| 2 | Jefferson City | 64 | 10 | 2 | 9 | 0 |
| 3 | Hazelwood Central | 52 | 5 | 10 | 1 | 0 |
| 4 | Blue Springs | 35 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| 5 | Christian Brothers College | 34 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 0 |

**Baseball** 1950–2026, 76 championships

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Francis Howell | 39 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| 2 | Oak Park | 32 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| 3 | Central (Cape Girardeau) | 29 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| 4 | Hazelwood Central | 26 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| 5 | Lafayette (Wildwood) | 25 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 |

**Basketball** 1927–2026, 99 championships

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Vashon | 51 | 8 | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| 2 | De Smet Jesuit | 45 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| 3 | St. Louis University High | 42 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 2 |
| 4 | Rockhurst | 36 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| 5 | Christian Brothers College | 35 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 1 |

**Cross-country** 1949–2026*, 77 championships

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | West Plains | 84 | 11 | 8 | 6 | 4 |
| 2 | St. Louis University High | 61 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 2 |
| 3 | Rock Bridge | 38 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 2 |
| 4 | Blue Springs | 35 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 2 |
| 5 | Beaumont | 33 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 1 |

* Includes the fall 2026 state meet (2026–27 school year), which had been held when the results were collected on November 14, 2026. See the clarification at the end of the paper.

**Golf** 1935–2026, 86 championships

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Rockhurst | 115 | 15 | 12 | 8 | 3 |
| 2 | Poplar Bluff | 52 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| 3 | Chaminade | 45 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 2 |
| 4 | Jefferson City | 39 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| 5 | Rock Bridge | 35 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 3 |

**Soccer** 1968–2025, 58 championships

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Rockhurst | 81 | 10 | 6 | 9 | 5 |
| 2 | Christian Brothers College | 71 | 10 | 7 | 5 | 0 |
| 3 | St. Louis University High | 50 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 2 |
| 4 | De Smet Jesuit | 49 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 2 |
| 5 | Vianney | 43 | 7 | 4 | 0 | 3 |

**Swimming & diving** 1938–2026, 90 championships

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Rockhurst | 73 | 15 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| 2 | Parkway West | 60 | 11 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| 3 | MICDS | 52 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 1 |
| 4 | Roosevelt | 45 | 6 | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| 4 | St. Louis University High | 45 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 8 |

**Tennis** 1968–2026, 58 championships

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Rockhurst | 118 | 18 | 9 | 8 | 3 |
| 2 | Rock Bridge | 56 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| 3 | Ladue Horton Watkins | 36 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 2 |
| 4 | Pembroke Hill | 34 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| 4 | Lindbergh | 34 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 |

**Track & field** 1926–2026, 100 championships

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | University City | 107 | 17 | 9 | 3 | 6 |
| 2 | Beaumont | 60 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 1 |
| 3 | Central (Kansas City) | 59 | 11 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| 4 | Kirkwood | 41 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 2 |
| 5 | Southwest (Kansas City) | 40 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 4 |

**Wrestling** 1931–2026, 96 championships

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ritenour | 93 | 16 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| 2 | Park Hill | 71 | 8 | 9 | 6 | 0 |
| 3 | Normandy | 70 | 4 | 11 | 8 | 5 |
| 4 | Blue Springs | 53 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 5 |
| 5 | Oak Park | 46 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 0 |

Football has no third-place game. Following Patrick's ruling, both semifinal losers score as tied for third, taken from MSHSAA's bracket for each year. Four years are missing; see the limits section.

3 · BY ERA

## The leaders changed with the state

The all-time table favors programs that have been competing for a century. Splitting the record into three periods shows who led in each.

### Through 1969

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Beaumont | 148 | 21 |
| 2 | University City | 141 | 20 |
| 3 | Kirkwood | 127 | 11 |
| 4 | Normandy | 118 | 12 |
| 5 | Ritenour | 100 | 18 |
| 6 | Webster Groves | 89 | 6 |
| 7 | St. Louis University High | 77 | 7 |
| 8 | Central (Kansas City) | 70 | 10 |

### 1970 to 1999

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Jefferson City | 166 | 19 |
| 2 | Rockhurst | 157 | 24 |
| 3 | Parkway West | 128 | 16 |
| 4 | De Smet Jesuit | 118 | 15 |
| 5 | Blue Springs | 102 | 9 |
| 6 | Hazelwood Central | 99 | 9 |
| 7 | Lindbergh | 97 | 13 |
| 8 | Hickman | 84 | 5 |

2000 to 2026

| RANK | PROGRAM | POINTS | TITLES |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Rockhurst | 368 | 53 |
| 2 | Rock Bridge | 183 | 22 |
| 3 | St. Louis University High | 146 | 16 |
| 4 | Christian Brothers College | 126 | 17 |
| 5 | Blue Springs | 119 | 13 |
| 6 | Chaminade | 111 | 11 |
| 7 | Liberty | 104 | 13 |
| 8 | De Smet Jesuit | 98 | 10 |

4 · THE BRACKET

## Was the draw fair to every region?

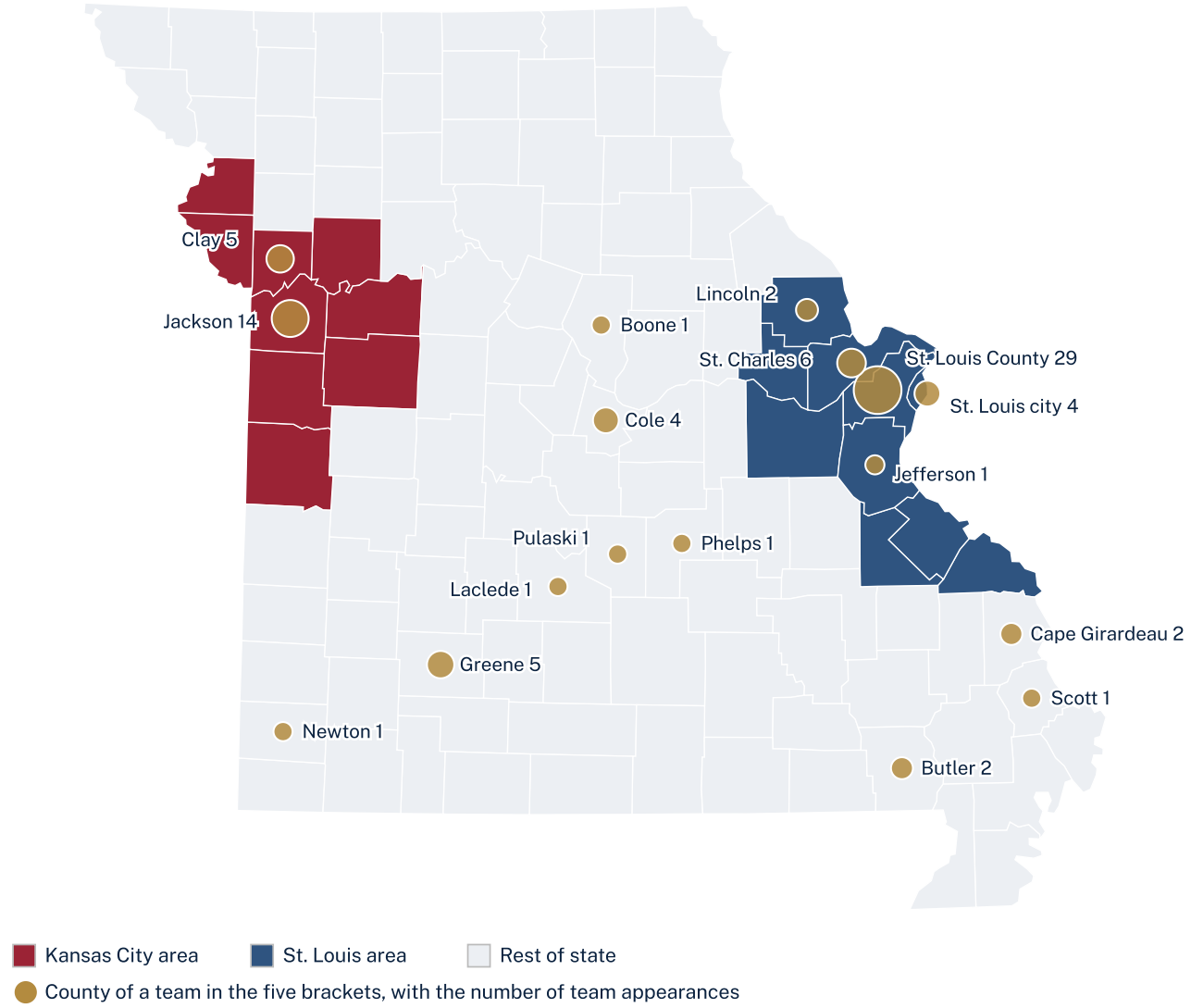
Patrick's recollection from 1998 to 2002 was that Kansas City was in effect one section of the top-class bracket, St. Louis two, and the rest of the state the fourth. Five top-class brackets from those years were found: three in basketball, one in soccer and one in football. Each sorted sixteen teams into four quarters, and only one team from each quarter reached the state semifinals.

**The regions used here.** They follow how MSHSAA draws its districts, a rule Patrick set. Kansas City area: Jackson, Clay, Platte and Cass counties, plus Buchanan (St. Joseph), Ray, Lafayette, Johnson and Bates. St. Louis area: St. Louis city, St. Louis County, St. Charles and Jefferson counties, plus Lincoln, Franklin, Warren, St. Francois, Ste. Genevieve and Perry. Rest of state: every other county. MSHSAA places St. Joseph's schools with Kansas City's in most sports; in the one district list found from these years, for 2001–02 basketball, St. Joseph Central played in a district with Liberty and the Park Hill schools. The county assigned to each school is Claude's, checked by Mia.

FIGURE 3

## Where the bracket teams came from

Missouri counties, shaded by region. Circles mark the county of each team in the five brackets; the number is how many of the 80 places that county filled.




**Reading it:** St. Louis County alone filled 29 of the 80 places, more than the whole Kansas City area.

Of the 80 places in the five brackets, 42 went to St. Louis-area teams, 19 to Kansas City-area teams and 19 to the rest of the state. The quarters, one bracket at a time:

**1997–98 basketball, Class 4A** bracket

| QUARTER | TEAMS (COUNTY) | REGION MIX |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Jackson (Cape Girardeau); Lafayette (Wildwood) (St. Louis County); Francis Howell North (St. Charles); Vianney (St. Louis County) | St. Louis 3 Rest of state 1 |
| 2 | Vashon (St. Louis city); Ladue Horton Watkins (St. Louis County); Riverview Gardens (St. Louis County); De Smet Jesuit (St. Louis County) | St. Louis 4 |
| 3 | Troy Buchanan (Lincoln); Jefferson City (Cole); Lebanon (Laclede); Kickapoo (Greene) | St. Louis 1 Rest of state 3 |
| 4 | Truman (Jackson); Hickman Mills (Jackson); Raytown South (Jackson); Liberty (Clay) | Kansas City 4 |

**1998–99 basketball, Class 4A** bracket

| QUARTER | TEAMS (COUNTY) | REGION MIX |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Central (Kansas City) (Jackson); Raytown South (Jackson); Liberty (Clay); Blue Springs South (Jackson) | Kansas City 4 |
| 2 | De Smet Jesuit (St. Louis County); DeSoto (Jefferson); Kirkwood (St. Louis County); Sikeston (Scott) | St. Louis 3 Rest of state 1 |
| 3 | Vashon (St. Louis city); Hazelwood Central (St. Louis County); Christian Brothers College (St. Louis County); Lindbergh (St. Louis County) | St. Louis 4 |
| 4 | Glendale (Greene); Hillcrest (Greene); Troy Buchanan (Lincoln); Francis Howell North (St. Charles) | St. Louis 2 Rest of state 2 |

**2001–02 basketball, Class 4A** bracket

| QUARTER | TEAMS (COUNTY) | REGION MIX |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Northeast (Kansas City) (Jackson); Lee's Summit North (Jackson); Liberty (Clay); Blue Springs (Jackson) | Kansas City 4 |

| QUARTER | TEAMS (COUNTY) | REGION MIX |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Parkway West (St. Louis County); Hazelwood Central (St. Louis County); De Smet Jesuit (St. Louis County); Poplar Bluff (Butler) | St. Louis 3 Rest of state 1 |
| 3 | Vianney (St. Louis County); Vashon (St. Louis city); Chaminade (St. Louis County); Eureka (St. Louis County) | St. Louis 4 |
| 4 | Neosho (Newton); Waynesville (Pulaski); Jefferson City (Cole); Ft. Zumwalt North (St. Charles) | St. Louis 1 Rest of state 3 |

**1998 soccer, Class 4A** bracket

| QUARTER | TEAMS (COUNTY) | REGION MIX |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Jackson (Cape Girardeau); Hazelwood Central (St. Louis County); Lindbergh (St. Louis County); Chaminade (St. Louis County) | St. Louis 3 Rest of state 1 |
| 2 | De Smet Jesuit (St. Louis County); Christian Brothers College (St. Louis County); Francis Howell North (St. Charles); Lafayette (Wildwood) (St. Louis County) | St. Louis 4 |
| 3 | Rockwood Summit (St. Louis County); Jefferson City (Cole); Rolla (Phelps); Kickapoo (Greene) | St. Louis 1 Rest of state 3 |
| 4 | Lee's Summit North (Jackson); Rockhurst (Jackson); Blue Springs (Jackson); Liberty (Clay) | Kansas City 4 |

**1998 football, Class 5A** bracket

| QUARTER | TEAMS (COUNTY) | REGION MIX |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Poplar Bluff (Butler); Kirkwood (St. Louis County); Rockwood Summit (St. Louis County); Parkway West (St. Louis County) | St. Louis 3 Rest of state 1 |

| QUARTER | TEAMS (COUNTY) | REGION MIX |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Parkway North (St. Louis County); Pattonville (St. Louis County); St. Louis University High (St. Louis city); Riverview Gardens (St. Louis County) | St. Louis 4 |
| 3 | Francis Howell (St. Charles); Ft. Zumwalt South (St. Charles); Jefferson City (Cole); Glendale (Greene) | St. Louis 2<br>Rest of state 2 |
| 4 | Rockhurst (Jackson); Blue Springs South (Jackson); Hickman (Boone); Oak Park (Clay) | Kansas City 3<br>Rest of state 1 |

The pattern matches Patrick's recollection in every bracket. One quarter was Kansas City's, two were St. Louis's, and the fourth belonged mainly to the rest of the state. That fourth quarter also took in one or two St. Louis-area schools every time, usually from St. Charles or Lincoln County (in 1998 soccer, Rockwood Summit). Two more details are not in the recollection. Schools from the southeast (Jackson, Sikeston and Poplar Bluff) were drawn into St. Louis quarters. And Columbia's Hickman was drawn into the Kansas City quarter in football.

What follows from this is limited. A geographic draw means only one Kansas City-area team can reach the semifinals, while two St. Louis-area teams will. Whether that was unfair depends on how many strong programs each region had, and this study cannot measure that. MSHSAA's online district assignments begin with 2008–09. For these years, one district list was found, for 2001–02 basketball, on a Springfield Glendale fan site rather than from MSHSAA. Its sixteen district champions are exactly the sixteen teams in that year's bracket, and the quarters were districts 1–4, 5–8, 9–12 and 13–16. District 1 was Poplar Bluff, Jackson, Farmington and Cape Central, the southeast schools drawn into a St. Louis quarter; District 9 put Fort Zumwalt North, West and South with Troy, Wentzville and Hannibal in the rest-of-state quarter. One season's list cannot show how many contenders each quarter eliminated across the period. Five brackets in three sports are a pattern, not a test.

5 · WHO WINS

## Region, size, and public or private

This section widens the lens beyond the top division to every class, because the question it asks is about the state as a whole: once a team reaches the final four, which kinds of schools finish the job? The measure is simple. Of each group's top-four finishes, how many became state titles? If

every top-four team had an even chance, the answer would be about 25%. Football is left out of this measure because MSHSAA lists only the two finalists in its lower classes. Schools are sorted into regions by county, as in the bracket section, and as public or private by Claude, not MSHSAA.

**The rules on private schools.** Missouri has tried several ways to keep private-school success from crowding out smaller public schools. From 2002–03 through 2019–20, a private school's enrollment was multiplied by 1.35 to set its class, and single-gender schools got a double multiplier. Member schools voted 294–133 in 2019 to drop it. From 2020–21 a Championship Factor took its place. Private and charter programs earned points for team postseason finishes over six seasons and moved up one or two classes when they earned enough. In June 2026 MSHSAA's board reworked that factor for the 2026–27 school year. Recent titles now count most, and a program can move up as many as five classes. Neither version can move a school above the top class.

**Private schools' share of state titles.** Champions in every class, from MSHSAA's pages:

| DIVISION | 1980–2002 NO RULE | 2003–2019 ENROLLMENT MULTIPLIER | 2020–2026 CHAMPIONSHIP FACTOR |
|---|---|---|---|
| Top division | 29% (66 of 230) | 43% (73 of 171) | 54% (34 of 63) |
| All classes below the top | 35% (163 of 471) | 32% (151 of 476) | 26% (59 of 226) |
| Smallest class only | 33% (66 of 202) | 42% (66 of 156) | 21% (13 of 63) |

The smallest class is where the rules were aimed, and the current one appears to work there. The private share of smallest-class titles rose under the multiplier, from 33% to 42%, because multiplying a small school's enrollment by 1.35 usually leaves it small. Since the Championship Factor began it has fallen to 21%, the lowest of any period. The top division moved the other way. Private schools have won more than half its titles since 2020. The four large all-boys schools — Rockhurst, St. Louis University High, Christian Brothers College and De Smet Jesuit — are in the top class regardless of any rule, and smaller private schools moved up by the factor have kept winning there: Cardinal Ritter in Class 6 basketball in 2024, Pembroke Hill and John Burroughs in top-division tennis. Valle Catholic won 13 lower-class titles from 2003 to 2019 and none since. The rules move private success up the ladder; they do not remove it. This is a pattern in the record, not proof of cause.

**Which regions finish the job.** Share of top-four finishes that became titles:

| DIVISION AND PERIOD | ST. LOUIS AREA | KANSAS CITY AREA | REST OF STATE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Top division, before 1980 | 27% | 27% | 22% |
| Top division, 1980–2002 | 27% | 26% | 19% |
| Top division, 2003–2026 | 21% | 32% | 21% |
| Classes below the top, before 1980 | 28% | 26% | 24% |
| Classes below the top, 1980–2002 | 32% | 23% | 23% |
| Classes below the top, 2003–2026 | 31% | 24% | 22% |

In the top division Kansas City-area schools have converted best since 2003, at 32%, and the rest of the state has trailed or tied for last in every period. Rockhurst is a large part of Kansas City's edge; without it, Kansas City's top-division rate since 2003 is 26%. Below the top division the story belongs to St. Louis: its schools have converted about three in ten of their top-four finishes in every period, ahead of both other regions. Split by public and private since 2003:

| SINCE 2003 | PUBLIC SCHOOLS | PRIVATE SCHOOLS |
|---|---|---|
| Top division, St. Louis area | 13% (25 of 195) | 31% (49 of 158) |
| Top division, Kansas City area | 25% (50 of 199) | 44% (48 of 108) |
| Top division, Rest of state | 22% (39 of 178) | – |
| Classes below the top, St. Louis area | 28% (75 of 270) | 35% (95 of 274) |
| Classes below the top, Kansas City area | 21% (65 of 307) | 31% (36 of 117) |
| Classes below the top, Rest of state | 22% (216 of 976) | 24% (38 of 157) |

St. Louis-area public schools in the top division are the outlier on the low side. They reach the top four often but have converted only 13% since 2003, while the area's private schools took most of its top-division titles. In the classes below, St. Louis-area public schools convert at 28%, above any other region's public schools.

**The profiles, ranked.** Size here is the class a team played in that year: *Large* is the top class, *Mid-size* the upper half of the classes below it, *Small* the lower half. Since 2003, profiles with at least 25 top-four finishes:

| RANK | SCHOOL PROFILE | TOP-FOUR FINISHES | TITLES | BECAME TITLES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Large private school, Kansas City area | 108 | 48 | 44% |
| 2 | Small private school, St. Louis area | 136 | 51 | 38% |
| 3 | Mid-size private school, St. Louis area | 138 | 44 | 32% |
| 4 | Large private school, St. Louis area | 158 | 49 | 31% |
| 5 | Small private school, Kansas City area | 81 | 25 | 31% |
| 6 | Mid-size private school, Kansas City area | 36 | 11 | 31% |
| 7 | Mid-size public school, St. Louis area | 170 | 50 | 29% |
| 8 | Small private school, Rest of state | 103 | 26 | 25% |
| 9 | Large public school, Kansas City area | 199 | 50 | 25% |
| 10 | Small public school, St. Louis area | 100 | 25 | 25% |
| 11 | Small public school, Rest of state | 711 | 160 | 23% |
| 12 | Mid-size private school, Rest of state | 54 | 12 | 22% |
| 13 | Small public school, Kansas City area | 163 | 36 | 22% |
| 14 | Large public school, Rest of state | 178 | 39 | 22% |
| 15 | Mid-size public school, Rest of state | 265 | 56 | 21% |

| RANK | SCHOOL PROFILE | TOP-FOUR FINISHES | TITLES | BECAME TITLES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16 | Mid-size public school, Kansas City area | 144 | 29 | 20% |
| 17 | Large public school, St. Louis area | 195 | 25 | 13% |

For a player on a team that makes the final four, the best odds since 2003 have been at a large private school in the Kansas City area (44%) or a small private school in the St. Louis area (38%). Other private schools in the two metro areas, and mid-size public schools in the St. Louis area, come next at roughly three in ten. Public schools outside the two metro areas, at every size, sit near one in five, and large public schools in the St. Louis area are last at 13%. Columbia's schools are too few to rank on their own. This measures finishing, not getting there: the rest of the state supplies most of Missouri's final-four teams simply because it has most of the schools, and the record does not show how many teams of each profile tried.

6 · METHOD

## How the totals were built

**Top division.** The largest-enrollment class in that sport in that year, whatever it was called at the time. Where a sport had one class, that class counts.

| SPORT | TOP DIVISION BY ERA |
|---|---|
| Football | 1968–1981: 4A. 1982–2001: 5A. 2002–2025: Class 6. |
| Baseball | 1950–1972: one class. 1973–1979: AA. 1980–2002: 4A. 2003–2012: Class 4. 2013–2019: Class 5. 2021–2026: Class 6. No 2020 season. |
| Basketball | One class in 1927–1931, 1934–1938 and 1943–1949; Class A in 1932–1933, 1939–1942 and 1950–1955. 1956–1973: L. 1974–2002: 4A. 2003–2019: Class 5. 2020: top classes not contested. 2021–2026: Class 6. |
| Cross-country | 1949–1974: one class (no official meet in 1955). 1975–1978: AA. 1979–2001: 4A. 2002–2019: Class 4. 2020–2026: Class 5. |
| Golf | 1935–1979: one class (no record for 1942–1945 or 1959). 1980–2002: 4A. 2003–2019: Class 4. 2021–2026: Class 5. No 2020 season. |
| Soccer | 1968–1984: one class. 1985–2001: 4A. 2002–2013: Class 3. 2014–2025: Class 4. |
| Swimming & diving | 1938–2016: one class. 2017–2026: Class 2. |

| SPORT | TOP DIVISION BY ERA |
|---|---|
| Tennis | 1968–1979: one class. 1980–2002: 4A. 2003–2019: Class 2. 2021–2026: Class 3. No 2020 season. |
| Track & field | 1926–1966: A. 1967–1973: L. 1974–2002: 4A. 2003–2014: Class 4. 2015–2026: Class 5. No 2020 season. |
| Wrestling | 1931–1970: one class. 1971–1973: L. 1974–1979: AA. 1980–2002: 4A. 2003–2004: Class 3. 2005–2026: Class 4. |

**Ties and missing places.** These follow rulings Patrick made before the totals were run. Co-champions each get 4 points and the next finisher gets third-place points. Teams tied for second each get 3 and the next finisher gets fourth-place points. Teams tied for third each get 2 and no one gets 1. Where MSHSAA lists a runner-up as "historically vacated," the champion keeps 4 and no one gets 3. MSHSAA's current pages are used as they stand. In 2020, classes that were contested are scored normally and classes that were not are treated as no championship.

**School names.** MSHSAA lists some schools under more than one name. These were combined: Augustinian Academy (also listed as Augustinian); Central (Kansas City) (also listed as Central (KC)); Central (St. Louis) (also listed as Central (STL)); Chaminade (also listed as Chaminade College Prep, Chaminade College Preparatory); Cleveland NJROTC (also listed as Cleveland); De Smet Jesuit (also listed as DeSmet); DeAndreis (St. Louis) (also listed as DeAndreis (STL)); Hadley Tech (also listed as Hadley Tech (St. Louis)); Hazelwood Central (also listed as Hazelwood); Hickman (also listed as Hickman with Columbia Independent); MICDS (also listed as Country Day (St. Louis)); Manual (Kansas City) (also listed as Manual (KC)); McBride (also listed as McBride (STL), McBride (St. Louis)); Northeast (Kansas City) (also listed as Northeast (Kansas City) Middle School); O'Fallon Tech (also listed as O'Fallon Technical); Parkwood (Joplin) (also listed as Parkwood); Pembroke Hill (also listed as Pembroke Country Day, Pembroke Day); Southeast (Kansas City) (also listed as Southeast (KC)); Southwest (St. Louis) (also listed as Southwest (STL)); St. Louis University High (also listed as SLUH, St. Louis University); St. Thomas Aquinas-Mercy (also listed as Aquinas-Mercy, St. Thomas Aquinas); Westport (Kansas City) (also listed as Westport).

**Not in the totals.** Girls sports, boys volleyball, lacrosse and hockey are outside the scope Patrick set. Before the 1950s Missouri's Black high schools competed in a separate association, the Missouri Negro Interscholastic Athletic Association, and its championships are not in MSHSAA's record or in this ranking. Only a partial list of those titles, in boys basketball, was found, and it rests on sources this study did not read directly, so it is not reproduced here. Programs such as Vashon and Sumner are counted only from the point MSHSAA's record includes them.

7 · LIMITS

## What this study could not settle

- **Four football years are incomplete.** MSHSAA's football history lists only the champion and runner-up, so the semifinal losers were taken from its bracket pages, gathered by Mia for 51 years and read by Claude for 1986, 1987 and 2007. The brackets for 1985, 1988, 1989 and 2006 could not be retrieved. Those years score the champion and runner-up only, which MSHSAA's Show-Me Bowl records confirm, and their semifinalists are missing from the totals.
- **Two places where MSHSAA's own pages disagree.** For 1993 football, the history page lists McCluer as runner-up, while the bracket shows McCluer North playing Jefferson City in the final; this study follows the bracket. For 1977 soccer, the detailed history lists St. Thomas Aquinas as champion and Bishop DuBourg second after a 2–2 final, while the summary list puts both teams in the champion column; this study counts them as co-champions.
- **The data is copied text, not the original pages.** The records were saved as text from a browser. A sample of about 110 championships in nine sports matched MSHSAA's live pages exactly. Soccer's live page would not load for Claude; Mia re-read it, and it matched the saved copy.
- **Name merges are judgment calls.** Treating Hazelwood and Hazelwood Central, Pembroke Country Day and Pembroke Hill, and Country Day and MICDS as single programs follows how the schools' histories are usually described, and was not confirmed with MSHSAA. Parkwood and Memorial in Joplin are kept separate from Joplin High School.
- **Swimming lists 2006 twice.** MSHSAA shows two championships in 2006, both won by Rockhurst. The swimming season was moved within the school year, so two championships fell in the same calendar year. Both are counted.
- **Gaps in the record.** Golf has no entries for 1942–1945 or 1959 and lists only a champion in 1936 and 1946. Soccer lists no third or fourth place for 1968–1970. Several early wrestling years list no fourth place. These are scored as the record shows.
- **The "who wins" section rests on Claude's sorting.** Which schools are private (about 80 schools) and which county each school sits in were assigned by Claude and have not been checked against MSHSAA. Third and fourth place in the lower classes were read from the same saved pages; 878 of 967 lower-class results since 1980 outside football parsed cleanly and the

rest are left out. Schools appear year after year, so these are patterns, not independent trials, and the record cannot say why a group finishes better.

- **The bracket question is open.** The pattern was checked in five brackets from three sports. A district membership list was found for only one of them, 2001–02 basketball, and it comes from a fan site, not MSHSAA. The regions are drawn by county. MSHSAA's own districts do not always follow county lines; St. Joseph, for example, has its own basketball district.

**Clarification.** The championship results were collected from MSHSAA on November 14, 2026. By then the fall 2026 cross-country state meet, which belongs to the 2026–27 school year, had been held, so it is included in the cross-country totals. The other nine sports run through the 2025–26 school year.

8 · SOURCES

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DISCLOSURES

# Disclosures and citation

Prompted and verified by Patrick Ishmael, Founding Prompter, for Prompt Inquiry, a project of the Ishmael Policy Institute. Drafted with AI assistance (Claude and Mia) under the prompter's direction. Version 1.0, published November 25, 2026. Sources, method, and corrections are published with this study. See the Institute Charter for the verification standard.

Question from Patrick Ishmael, a letterman.

## ABOUT THE PROMPTER

Patrick Ishmael is the founder of the Ishmael Policy Institute and Prompt Inquiry's Founding Prompter and Editor. He has spent most of his career in and around Missouri public policy. He worked on political campaigns, and from May 2011 to January 2024 he worked at the Show-Me Institute, a Missouri public policy organization, where he wrote on state and local government and testified before Missouri legislative committees. Today he is a financial advisor and a Missouri attorney. He holds honors degrees in finance and political science from Saint Louis University and a law degree from Saint Louis University School of Law. Several of the questions he revisits here began as his own student work there.

This bio is the prompter's disclosure. It is the same on every study he leads.

**Legacy study.** First published as a Special Project on The Ishmael Record (patrickishmael.com), November 15, 2026, before this charter was adopted. It is republished as it was made, except that its notes on who did the work now match this site's byline. Against the current publishing standard it lacks the opening prompt, the prompter's starting view, and a challenge step stating the strongest counter-argument, because those requirements did not exist when it was made. They have not been reconstructed after the fact. Patrick Ishmael verified it for republication. Its versioning begins at 1.0, and any later change is recorded in the change log.

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