

Northwestern Played in MSM for Decades; Virden, Girard Were Charter Members

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The name of the conference is all wrong. The spirit, though, never changes.

This spring wrapped up the 100th season of play in the MSM Conference, which represents the best in small-school athletics in the state of Illinois.

Palmyra Northwestern was a member of the MSM for decades before the school's decision to co-op with Greenfield in 2011.

Virden was part of the MSM from its founding until the school left for the South Central Conference in 1967. Girard was also a member for decades.

Current Macoupin County members include Mount Olive and Bunker Hill, who are among the more recent to join the league.

The name of the MSM Conference is an acronym for the three central Illinois that were home to the original members -- "Macoupin, Sangamon, and Morgan."

Like many high school and college conferences, geography has been pushed aside in the MSM's century of existence. Current members include schools from Montgomery and Christian counties, among others.

The conference was established on April 3, 1926 with five charter schools: Auburn, Girard, Virden, Pawnee, and Waverly. The first athletic event in MSM history was a track meet at Virden, fourteen days after the founding. Competition in football and basketball began the following school year.

This season, fourteen schools made up the MSM, including Lincolnwood, Nokomis, Mt. Olive, Bunker Hill, Morrisonville, Edinburg, Pawnee, Sangamon Valley, South County (Franklin and Waverly), Kincaid

South Fork, Springfield Lutheran, Springfield Calvary, and Buffalo Tri-City.

The MSM is defined by schools with small enrollments, as six of the fourteen members are below 100 total students. As a result, many members co-op with neighboring schools in a variety of sports.

The conference currently sponsors competition in volleyball, boys' golf, girls' golf, boys' basketball, girls' basketball, softball, baseball, boys' track, girls' track, scholastic bowl, and bass fishing.

Virden won the first-ever MSM football title in 1926 with a 7-0-1 mark. In a time before the school nickname was "Bulldogs," Virden battled Carlinville to a scoreless tie in the season opener, then reeled off seven straight shutouts.

The Virden offense in 1926 was potent for the time, scoring an average of 31.6 points per game. Virden became one of the teams to beat in the MSM in the first decade of the league's existence, taking outright conference titles in football in 1927, 1928, 1929, and 1936, while sharing the crown in both 1930 and 1934.

In the 1950s, Virden was annually a top contender for the MSM football title, though the Bulldogs faced a powerhouse in Auburn. The 1955 matchup between the schools was particularly interesting, as Auburn came in on a 35-game conference winning streak, and had won the previous four MSM titles. The Trojans also won the conference in 1957.

The Bulldogs reached the seven-win mark in football in 1951, 1952, 1954, and 1956 before a perfect 9-0 record in 1959.

In boys' basketball, Virden won 20 games in back-to-back years in 1931-32 and 1932-33, then went 18-7 in

1936-37.

Virden won the MSM in track in 1954 and captured undefeated conference titles in baseball in both 1953 and 1954, among other achievements.

The Bulldogs also claimed the MSM championship in boys' basketball in 1956-57, knocking off Auburn in the season finale, when both teams entered with unbeaten conference records. The Bulldogs rallied from a 23-10 first-quarter deficit for the win. Virden also shared the conference title in 1958-59, then won it outright in 1959-60, going 24-3 overall.

Virden formally joined the South Central on April 6, 1966, and began conference play in 1967.

Northwestern, which had joined the MSM by 1952, earned three straight conference titles in volleyball from 1974-76 and was a combined 50-8 in that span. The school also won the MSM championship in football in 1967 (the sport was last contested in conference play in 1984). The Wildcats were the runner-up in volleyball in 1979 and boys' basketball in 2003.

Among the unique features of the conference are the traveling trophies, which are contested in volleyball, boys' basketball, and girls' basketball, and add extra meaning to regular-season games.

Northwestern held the traveling trophy in boys' basketball at one time or another in four straight seasons from 2001-05.

MSM member schools have earned a surprising amount of hardware at Class A and 1A IHSA state tournaments. Lincolnwood finished third at state in boys' basketball in 1972, part of a 26-7 season, and captured the 2009 state baseball title at 34-2.

Though it was not an MSM member at the time, Nokomis

is believed to be the only conference school with two team state championships, winning in girls' basketball in both 1998 and 1999.

Nokomis was 33-2 each season with a nucleus led by Molly McDowell and coached by Marty Hough. Nokomis was also second in the state in boys' basketball in 2008 and third in 2013.

Others include the Lutheran volleyball program, which was third at state in consecutive years in 2010 and 2011. Lutheran was fourth in 2021, then second the following year. The program also qualified for the state tournament in both 2002 and 2004.

More recently, Pawnee was third at the state baseball tournament in 2025, while Kincaid won the state title in competitive cheerleading in 2007. Kincaid was also second in that competition in 2008, and third in 2010.

In a past generation, Morrisonville, which won three MSM titles in six years from 1949-55, was an Elite Eight team in boys' basketball in 1975, while the Lutheran girls' basketball program reached the Elite Eight in 1989.

In conference play in recent times, the boys' basketball title has been wide open, though Calvary has won or tied for the championship six times in the last decade. Calvary also won four straight conference titles from 2007-11, while Lincolnwood won six times in seven years from 1997-2004.

Since 2008, Pawnee has won or shared twelve MSM baseball titles, while Tri-City has ruled the conference in softball, winning thirteen straight MSM championships.

Lutheran earned 18 volleyball titles in 20 years from 2003-22, including eleven straight from 2003-13 and seven in a row from 2016-22.

Community Questions, Clear Answers: Understanding Property Taxes

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Understanding who does what within state and local government can sometimes be confusing. With information coming from many different sources, it can be difficult to determine what is accurate. To provide clarity, Extension will take a closer look each month at topics based on common questions and concerns from community members. The goal is to help residents better understand how responsibilities are divided among different levels of government.

Property tax bills have been mailed, and many taxpayers have questions when they arrive. Today, we'll address some of the most common questions. Per 35 ILCS 200/1-130 (a) of the Property Tax Code, "real property" is defined as the land itself and what is contained in it, permanent fixtures such as structures and buildings, minerals in the land, and any rights, privileges, and appurtenances (such as structures, built-in fixtures, landscaping, rights, and easements) belonging to the land. Real property is what is being taxed when we talk about property taxes.

What is the purpose of property taxes, and why are taxpayers responsible for funding services they may not personally use?

Property taxes fund essential community services that help create a safe, educated, and economically strong place to live. Even if you do not directly use services such as public schools or libraries, you still benefit from safer neighborhoods, well-maintained infrastructure, higher property values, and a stronger local economy.

Even renters contribute indirectly, as property taxes are typically built into rent costs. Businesses also contribute—those in Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts still pay taxes over time, and in the short-term help strengthen the community by improving property, creating jobs, and expanding the future tax base. In Illinois, these taxes are the primary funding source for local services, meaning everyone contributes to the community's overall quality of life and long-term success.

Why doesn't everyone within a county have the same taxing districts on their tax bill?

Your property's location determines which taxing districts receive your property taxes. These districts can range from countywide services, such as government and law enforcement, to specialized districts such as schools, libraries, and fire protection. School districts typically receive the largest share of property tax revenue, often around 65%. Each district has its own boundaries, which often overlap and may cross city, township, or county lines. As a result, every property is taxed based on a unique combination of districts, meaning not all taxpayers in the same county support the same services.

What can a property owner do to decrease their property taxes?

While property owners have limited control over their property tax bill, there are steps you can take to ensure you are not paying more than they should. Double-check your square footage, how many bedrooms/bathrooms are listed, and features on your property that may no longer exist, and if you find an error, file an appeal with your county assessor. Make sure to speak with your county's Treasurer's Office to find the appropriate way to file an appeal. They may recommend that you pay your taxes even if there is an appeal pending so that you avoid late fees, penalties, and interest.

You also might be eligible for exemptions. To learn more, check with your county assessor's office to see what you qualify for. Your township assessor will determine how much property tax you pay based on the value that they place on your property, which is assessed at 33 1/3% of market value. There are some exceptions to this rule, such as farm acreage.

The most effective way to help reduce property taxes in a community is to broaden the tax base. This can be achieved by encouraging residential and business development. In many cases, municipal governments have the tools and resources to offer incentives that attract growth, which can ultimately help lower the property tax burden for individual taxpayers.

Why do tax payments vary from year to year?

Your local property tax bill is influenced by two main factors: the assessed value of your property and local government spending.

The fair market value of your property is a key factor that impacts your tax bill. Elements that influence market value include housing demand (higher demand tends to push values up), location, physical characteristics (such as square footage, lot size, number of bedrooms and bathrooms, and the age and condition of the structure), as well as comparable property sales in your area. The assessed value of your property is typically 33 1/3% of its fair market value.

Local government spending also plays a significant role in property tax increases or decreases. Local taxing bodies determine how much revenue they need to fund public services. They then follow statutory procedures to adopt a formal tax levy, which is certified with the county clerk.

Who determines the amount a taxing body can levy (request)?

The local board of the taxing body determines the amount they are requesting based on a review of their operating costs and annual budget. The Illinois Truth in Taxation Act requires that taxing bodies requesting an amount more than 5% higher than the previous year's extension must publish a notice and hold a public hearing. If rate increases are also above statutory caps, then they must be approved by local votes through a public referendum.

What can be done if there are concerns about government spending or the amount a taxing body is levying?

If you are concerned about the amount a taxing body is levying, you can attend public budget hearings, review the budget, and share your concerns. You can make a greater impact by running for office within a government entity, supporting candidates with similar views on spending, or learning more about those seeking office so you can make informed voting decisions. Remember, when you vote, you are not just choosing a person. You are voting for their ability to ask questions and speak up, which can directly impact budgets and levies.

Where can you learn more?

To learn more, visit your local county's website and explore the Assessment Office and Treasurer's Office pages. An additional resource is the Illinois Department of Revenue's website, which provides detailed information on property taxation: <https://tax.illinois.gov/localgovernments/property.html>.

F1 Powerboats and Riverfront Thrills Return to Alton

3rd annual 2026
IHRA Alton Midwest
Nationals F1 Powerboat
Championships
set for July 17-19

The roar of engines and the rush of riverfront excitement return this summer as the IHRA Alton Midwest Nationals F1 Powerboat Championships powers back into Alton, Illinois for its third annual running, July 17–19, 2026, at Riverfront Park.

Fans can once again experience the high-speed spectacle of the IHRA Formula 1 Powerboat Championship Series, presented by Simmons Hanly Conroy LLP, the City of Alton, Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau, and Enjoy Illinois as elite drivers from across North America compete on the Mighty Mississippi River.

Tickets are on sale now for this action-packed weekend. General admission starts at \$15 per day (plus fees), with weekend passes available for \$25. VIP experiences are offered at \$125 per day or \$200 for the weekend, including parking, food and beverages, and exclusive driver meet-and-greet opportunities. Tickets and additional details are available at www.ihra.com.

"We are excited to welcome back the Alton Midwest Na-



tionals Championship," said Cory Jobe, President/CEO of the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau. "When racing returned to the Mississippi River, the enthusiasm from fans and newcomers alike was incredible. We look forward to another unforgettable weekend."

Following its successful debut in 2024, and a fantastic second year in 2025, the Alton Midwest Nationals has secured its place on the F1 Powerboat calendar through 2027, solidifying Alton as a premier destination for high-speed, water-based motorsports.

"The Alton race has quickly become one of the most

iconic stops on our circuit," said Tim Seebold, Managing Director of the IHRA Formula 1 Powerboat Series. "The combination of community support and the scenic Mississippi River backdrop makes this event truly special. We're building something long-term and unforgettable here."

Weekend Schedule Highlights

- Friday, July 17: Testing begins at 1 p.m., followed by the Downtown Drivers Meet & Greet Street Party at 6:30 p.m.
- Saturday, July 18 & Sunday, July 19: Racing action begins at 9 a.m. daily
- Sunday, July 19: Championship awards ceremony at 4:30 p.m.

Throughout the weekend, fans will witness Formula 1 powerboats reaching speeds of up to 120 mph, along with Formula Lights and Tri Hull racing classes. The event also features local food vendors, family-friendly activities, music and a vibrant festival atmosphere along the riverfront.

Expect tight turns, split-second strategy, and edge-of-your-seat competition as teams battle for podium glory in one of the most thrilling racing formats in motorsports. The IHRA Alton Midwest Nationals — Speed. Power. Family Fun.

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