



Association Position on Coin Operated League and Casual Play as Non-Contact Sport; Ability to Operate Safely

Introduction

Over the course of the past 10 months, coin operators have been struggling to remain in viable business due to challenges and restrictions initiated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Government mandated closures and limitations on location occupancy have made the operations of most coin operated amusement equipment nearly impossible; inevitably causing operator, distributor, manufacturer, and family entertainment center businesses to struggle. Many have been forced to downsize staff and either temporarily or permanently lay off employees; all have been anxiously awaiting further direction, only to find that government orders issued by the department are vague, overbroad, and are subject to various different opinions from local health officials. The orders that have been issued do not answer the most crucial question: can coin operated amusement equipment be in use when safety measures are enforced?

The association realizes that many Michigan businesses are struggling to interpret mandates and that crafting an order that fits the needs of every small business plan is impossible. In order to speak as a united front, the MCMOA Board of Directors met to consider how best to advise members of their movement forward and to get coin operated businesses back on track to doing business.

The one staple that every amusement coin operator business has is the ability to form leagues for playing, as well as the casual play of coin operated equipment. The leagues meet in local bars and restaurants, thereby boosting the economy of the bar and restaurant business, usually on days or evenings when the establishment would normally do less business. Leagues have been almost non-existent the past year as locations struggle between allowing league play and following orders while saving room for diners. It is the position, therefore, of the MCMOA Board of Directors that coin operated amusement leagues, such as pool, dart, pinball, foosball, shuffleboard and the like fall under the category of non-contact sports as defined in the latest MDHHS Epidemic Order.

Casual coin operated play used for practice and enjoyment can also safely be done to ensure that players and patrons remain healthy, and it is the position of the Association that casual play with safety restrictions can be conducted safely.

Coin Operated Play in General

Much like contact sports, pinball, foosball, darts, pool and shuffleboard have local competition, as well as state tournaments and national tournaments.

- The Michigan State Dart Tournament had 715¹ attendees in February of 2020 and was able to hold their event right before the pandemic shut down.
- The National Dart Association has attendance of 3,000² at their Las Vegas event each year.
- The Michigan State Pool Tournament had 878³ attendees in 2019.
- The VNEA (Valley National Eightball League Association), an International non-profit organized in Bay City, MI, holds a national pool tournament in Las Vegas every year that expects over 3,000⁴ attendees.

Participation in the State and National Events requires local leagues to play a fixed number of games or weeks in order to attend. In the 2020 year, Michigan players are at a distinct disadvantage, as states such as Ohio, Indiana, and Wisconsin have been allowing league play all year long, while the Michigan season has been non-existent.

Casual coin operated play helps players perfect their scores for league nights when they are recorded and sometimes, coin operated play of games is just for fun. League play and casual play are both important to players and the industry.

Coin Operated Games as Non-Contact Sports

The Epidemic Order definitions are:

- “Organized sports” means competitive athletic activity requiring skill or physical prowess and organized by a sports organizer.⁵
- “Sports Organizer” means an institution, association, or other organization that sets and enforces rules to ensure the physical health and safety of all participants for an organized sport.⁶
- Participants must wear masks at all times, unless actively eating or drinking.⁷

As illustrated with local, state and national organizations, players participating in pool, darts, or other coin operated sports by playing for a league and recording statistics and league nights played are participating in organized sports as defined above. Players must have an acquired skill in order to hit a bullseye or sink the eight ball. It also takes practice and acquired skill to complete a level on a video game or get the high score on a pinball machine.

Sports organizers are the associations, local, state and national, that set forth the rules for play in the leagues, which are enforced by the individual leagues.

¹ Figure provided by Compusport data at compusport.us

² ndadarts.com

³ Figure provided by Compusport data at compusport.us

⁴ Figure provided by Compusport data at compusport.us

⁵ January 22, 2021 Epidemic Order Section 1. Definitions, l. Organized Sports.

⁶ January 22, 2021 Epidemic Order Section 1. Definitions, n. Sports Organizer.

⁷ January 22, 2021, Epidemic Order, Section 7. Face mask requirements at gatherings, and Section 8(c), Exceptions.

Non-contact sports are permitted gatherings so long as they do not exceed 25% of the total occupancy and that participants maintain 6 feet of distance from each other.⁸

Spacing pool tables, dart boards, foosball or pinball tables, and any other stand-alone coin operated game more than 6 feet apart and limiting contact between players is feasible in most settings and can allow for league play.

Coin Op Equipment Can Be Operated Safely

With proper COVID-19 procedures in place leagues and casual coin operated play can safely operate. MCMOA asks all members that operate leagues to pledge they will:

- Abide by the epidemic order requirements,
- Require players to wear face masks,
- Keep equipment properly distanced,
- Maintain distancing between players and between players and general patrons,
- Sanitize equipment frequently,
- Supply hand sanitizing stations and disinfectant for players,
- Follow any other restrictions put in place by the location owner or the local health department.

Precautions will ensure that members and locations protect the public while allowing players to participate in these league events and while practicing through casual play.

Road Block to League and Casual Play

The largest roadblock to league and casual play are space requirements by venues and the perception by local health officials that coin operated leagues are not non-contact sport events. MCMOA encourages all members to work with their locations to find adequate space for tables and equipment that ensure players are distanced from each other and the general public. Leagues also serve the purpose of bringing patrons into the establishment to purchase food and drinks. Casual play has the same purpose, to allow players to practice, for fun, and to bring patrons into establishments.

Regarding local health official findings that coin operated sports are not actual organized sports, the above facts related to league organization refutes this supposition, and the need to practice requires casual play as well. MCMOA also encourages members to develop a relationship with their local health officials to troubleshoot issues and to open important communication channels. Ultimately, the health department will determine whether the events may take place, so it's important to have discussions with those individuals on why these leagues and casual coin operated play are important non-contact sports events.

⁸ January 22, 2021, Epidemic Order Section 6. Organized sports gathering restrictions, b(1) and (2) non-contact sports gatherings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, MCMOA takes the position that coin operated league and casual play can be classified as a non-contact sport in accordance with the current epidemic order. League and casual play can be done safely, by requiring masks, social distancing equipment and players, and frequent sanitization of equipment and controls.

All members should pledge to follow all state mandates, and to work with local health officials to maintain safe standards. Taking precautions will result in healthy players and minimize any possibility of spreading the virus.

Remember, together we are stronger.