

Verizon goes the extra mile for major high school sports event

Minnesota State High School League relies on Verizon for reliable connectivity during peak periods



Call it the curse of popularity. In 2023, more than 10,000 sports fans flocked to a major high school cross-country meet held on a golf course near the University of Minnesota's Minneapolis campus. Because of the unexpectedly large crowd, the sponsor of the state meet—the non-profit Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL)—experienced daunting communication challenges. Its cellular-based ticketing system failed. Posting of final results was slow. Its staff members struggled to connect via cell phone to coordinate activities. And participants and attendees were frustrated because they couldn't connect to social media. Committed to running efficient, positive events, MSHSL leaders vowed to improve the communication technology at this flagship event.

In its more than 100-year history, the MSHSL has earned its reputation as an enthusiastic supporter of all aspects of high-school sports via education and leadership. Its members include more than 500 Minnesota schools—public, private, and home schools—which participate in a range of League activities, including sports and fine arts. At its core

are the more than 50 championship events that the MSHSL administers every year.

It's a lot of work for a small non-profit with a staff of only 24, supplemented by committed volunteers and sports fans. So the MSHSL relies heavily on partners to provide key expertise and services. When Laura Mackenthun, MSHSL's Director of Information Systems, contacted Verizon after the 2023 meet, looking for wireless communication advice and assistance—she wasn't sure what to expect. "In my mind, I was thinking that it's just a six-hour event," she recalls, "and it's going to be over before most people even know what happened. So it might not be big enough to get attention." But her local Verizon representative, Landan Mortenson, took her challenges seriously. After all, thousands of attendees would be needing reliable connectivity at the 2024 event. He moved quickly to meet with Mackenthun, listen to the MSHSL's needs, and come up with a solution.

MSHSL Mission Statement

The Minnesota State High School League provides educational opportunities for students through interscholastic athletics and fine arts programs, and provides leadership and support for member schools.

Education and Leadership for a Lifetime

verizon

Leading up to (and during) the 2024 event, the Verizon team worked closely with the MSHSL to identify and solve the communication issues experienced the previous year, providing this small non-profit with major-league assistance. The good news? The 2024 cross-country meet, held in the same venue and equally well-attended, went flawlessly—with no issues at all. With Verizon's help, the MSHSL set a new standard of efficiency for its largest outdoor cross-country meet.

The challenges

Dealing with a difficult location—and a surge in cell traffic

Many of the MSHSL events take place inside stadiums and in other buildings that are more easily controlled for optimal communication. But its cross-country meet had relocated to a challenging site—a large golf course with rolling hills and lots of open space. There was an advantage from a logistics point of view—the course was fenced in, enabling event coordinators to control access and charge admission. But from a cellular communications vantage point, the golf course was less than ideal. The rolling hills created areas with diminished cell reception.



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Landan Mortenson
Verizon representative

More importantly, Verizon cellular service in the area was geared to handle a few dozen golfers, not a major event. “We found that the capacity was set for a hundred people or so—not ten thousand active users all talking and sharing video at the same time,” says Mortenson. “We quickly realized that the MSHSL didn't have a coverage problem—it had a capacity problem.”



The solution

Boosting capacity with state-of-the-art Verizon resources

To meet the needs of the upcoming event, Mortenson engaged the advanced resources and networking expertise of the Verizon Frontline Crisis Response Team, which helps first responders, government agencies, non-profit organizations and communities stay connected during emergencies. While no one would consider a cross-country meet an emergency, the team also helps solve other less-urgent communication challenges, depending on availability. And as Mortenson was well-aware, the team has an impressive array of mission-critical communication gear—including self-contained mobile cell sites specifically designed for short-term response.

Enter the LAAMA

After testing the area to determine the best placement, Verizon deployed an LTE as a Mobile Asset (LAAMA) adjacent to the golf course. A LAAMA is a large trailer with an extendable boom on it that plugs into local cellular fiber to provide additional connectivity and capacity. In short, it's a cell tower on wheels. And it's capable of temporarily supercharging cell service in localized areas, such as the meandering golf course where the cross-country meet would be held. With the LAAMA, attendees would have access to Verizon's full portfolio of 4G LTE and 5G Ultra Wideband connectivity, with speeds of 10 gigabytes per seconds. It would provide the network capacity and speed needed by event organizers to stay coordinated—and for thousands of attendees to send videos to their friends and to post on social media.

Knowing that ticketing was a critical issue, Verizon also installed a high-speed, enterprise-grade router with a powerful, directional antenna at the main ticketing booth. This capability would give the MSHSL staff its own private network for communication during the event. With these Verizon wireless resources in place, the MSHSL turned to the other challenges of organizing a major event—and hoped for great weather.



The benefits

A positive experience for all participants—and the MSHSL

Like its predecessor, the 2024 MSHSL cross-country state meet was also very popular, with more than 10,000 attendees watching more than 900 runners. And the weather was beautiful, encouraging people from the metro Minneapolis area to come watch the races. But this year, organizers were ready. Along with the cheering and the applause, there was one thing Mortenson and the MSHSL team didn't hear—complaints. “We had absolutely no complaints or problems with anything related to communication or connectivity—none,” says Mackenthun. “And in our world, no news is good news.”

Here are just some of its benefits that Verizon brought to the MSHSL:

- **Clear communication among the event staff**
Coordinating an event of this size requires a lot of communication. At the 2023 meet, the staff had a lot of trouble connecting. But thanks to the upgrades provided by Verizon in 2024, all staff members were able to call and text as needed—and always connect.
- **Successful digital ticketing and admission**
Ticketing was a major issue at the 2023 meet, resulting in crowds at the event gates and confusion among the ticketing staff and attendees. Not in 2024. People from across the state were able to get into the event without delays. “In one word, our ticketing was seamless,” concludes Mackenthun.
- **Plenty of connectivity for race timing**
The outside group conducting the meet timing plays a vital role, providing accurate results that runners and fans are anxious to see. Thanks to the connectivity changes Verizon implemented, MSHSL had no problem posting the detailed results—immediately.
- **Fast media posting**
Many complaints were received during the 2023 event. But with robust wireless connectivity and plenty of capacity, reporters and other media attendees could get their work out to the public quickly. And fans could share and post videos from the meet, immediately.
- **Responsive assistance—without extra management**
As head of IT at the MSHSL, Mackenthun was involved in coordinating the communication changes at the latest event. But she found it was a very light lift. “Part of me was nervous when I reached out to Verizon, since I thought that it was

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Laura Mackenthun

Director of Information Systems
Minnesota State High School League

going to put more work on my already-full plate,” she recalls. “But Verizon did all the work, from the beginning to the event itself. It was amazing how many different solutions that Landan and the Verizon team were able to come up with, all to help us. And even more impressive was how they made it all just happen, quickly and easily.”

- **A state-of-the-art network—and specialized equipment**
The fast, reliable Verizon network provided exceptional connectivity during the meet. And the LAAMA and other specialized networking equipment brought in by the Verizon Response Team performed exceptionally—then moved on to other challenges.

Looking to the future

An ongoing partnership

Now that the event is over, the golf course can go back to normal communication capacity. And the MSHSL staff can breathe a sigh of relief. But when the Fall 2025 cross-country meet—or another other similar outdoor event—comes around, the MSHSL will be ready. And confident that Verizon will be there to help.

Learn more

To find out how to bring fast, reliable Verizon connectivity to your non-profit organization, contact Verizon at [verizon.com/publicsector](https://www.verizon.com/publicsector).

