

Flipped? Condensed? Overlapped? Options aren't ideal if PIAA seasons need altered

By: [Chris Harlan](#)

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Moon coach Ryan Linn looks on as his players participate in drills during practice at the school Thursday, Aug. 9, 2018.



There are days when Aaron Albert coaches football in the morning, sprints to his real estate job for a few hours and then heads to the ballpark for evening baseball.

It's hectic, but it sure beats sitting at home.

"Life went from nothing for a lot a months to everything at once," said Albert, who's the head baseball coach and an assistant football coach at Kiski Area.

It's a crazy schedule coaches are willing to keep in the summer, and most would prefer to focus on one sport at a time once school starts. But after seeing other states adjust their high school schedules to avoid cancellations, some wonder whether Pennsylvania might see condensed, flipped or overlapped seasons.

If so, that could be challenging for multi-sport athletes and coaches.



would be tough to tell a kid to choose baseball or football," Albert said. "I don't know what the



kid I would do."



California was the latest to make drastic changes.



all sports there including football won't start until December or January — a doable option for a state with year-round warmer weather. However, baseball, softball, wrestling, basketball, track



and seven other sports are now [combined into one "spring" season](#) that ends in June.



in a state closer to home, the New York State Public High School Athletic Association [revealed a](#)



[condensed schedule](#) that it will use if needed. The plan switches the order of the seasons,



starting with winter (Jan. 4 to March 13) before fall (March 1 to May 8) and lastly spring (April 5 to June 12).



any college conferences also are rearranging schedules.

The Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference [suspended all fall sports](#) at its NCAA Division II schools and planned to shift them to the spring semester.

So far, the PIAA has revealed no such plans.

"I don't think that you could play everything in the spring like the PSAC," Albert said. "For the most part, colleges don't have many dual-sport athletes — maybe a handful."

“That would be an unfair thing to do for kids,” said West Allegheny baseball coach Bryan Cornell, who’s also the defensive coordinator for the school’s football team. “I’m just thinking of all the multi-sport athletes. For example, we have Gavin Miller, who’s our starting quarterback and has a college baseball scholarship to Auburn. You’re going to make that kid decide what sport he’s going to play, if they choose spring football.”

The PIAA board announced last week that it intends to hold fall sports as scheduled — beginning Aug. 10 with heat acclimatization for football — and advance through the other seasons in usual order. Some advocates around the state had called for fall and spring sports to flip, but that’s not in the PIAA’s plans.

“Our intent is to play fall as scheduled, even if it would end up in a shortened fashion or an altered fashion,” PIAA executive director Bob Lombardi said last week. “With the flipping of those sports, there’s a false narrative that the spring is going to be better than the fall. There’s no guarantee of that. It’s also wrought with other concerns of overuse. And if you flip those two and the fall goes down, does the spring lose two (seasons) in a row? That’s inadequate.”

The PIAA board meets again July 29.

Lombardi said the PIAA has considered contingency plans but won’t discuss them unless needed.

“I’m not going to get into the ‘what if’ of it,” he said, “because I think it’s dangerous.”

However, Lombardi noted that spring football wouldn’t leave enough time for athletes to physically recover before summer workouts resume for the next season. Also, moving spring sports to the fall wouldn’t work logistically.

“Where are you going to put track if you move it to the fall?” Lombardi said. “We need a place to house 2,600 athletes in dorms (for the state championships). And all colleges at that time in November are probably going to be in some type of session.”

So, “flipping” is an idea the PIAA doesn’t favor.

The other options also have drawbacks. If multiple seasons were overlapped like in California, some schools likely wouldn’t be able to field teams without sharing athletes among multiple sports.

“I don’t know what they would do with the smaller schools,” Cornell said. “There’s no way. Those smaller schools need multi-sport athletes to have seasons.”

The California Interscholastic Federation — that state’s version of the PIAA — acknowledged that overlapping seasons could cause conflicts for athletes and facilities. Quite a few coaches are involved in more than one sport as well.

Ryan Linn is head coach for both the football and softball teams at Moon. His wife, Diamond, is a girls basketball assistant there. They also have two young children at home, but Linn said they’ll do whatever it takes to see their high school kids play sports.

“My wife and I are pretty much playing tag halfway through the year,” Linn said. “I go to football, she goes to basketball and as soon as basketball’s over, I go to softball. A condensed season would be busy for us, but if it gives everyone a chance to play, I’ll do it.”

He’s optimistic the PIAA can keep the seasons in order, but sees a condensed schedule like New York’s as a possibility later in the school year. Still, he’s hopeful football starts next month, as the PIAA wants.

“As much talk as you hear about getting kids back to school, we want kids to get back to normal,” Linn said. “This is part of their normal. I know there’s a lot going on in the world and us playing a game is probably very small, but this is what these kids do.”

Fall practices for all sports start Aug. 17.

“You want the kids to get back to normalcy,” Cornell said. “Kids need sports. There are a lot of kids that it helps and makes them tick, makes them better students. A lot of people don’t understand that, but that’s why high school sports are so vital.”

Cornell is currently quarantining away from the football team for two weeks after a trip to South Carolina. With so many questions unanswered, he’s not convinced sports will remain on schedule.

“I sure hope so,” Cornell said, “but I’m not very optimistic at this point.”

Chris Harlan is a Tribune-Review Staff Writer. You can contact Chris by email at charlan@tribweb.com or via Twitter .

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