



HIGH-SCHOOL

TSSAA plans on having football season; restrictions include face masks at games

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MURFREESBORO — The TSSAA Board of Control moved ahead with a contingency plan for a high school football season Wednesday along with a list of restrictions if games are played.

Teams have been barred from having contact at practices after Gov. Bill Lee extended an emergency order through Aug. 29. The first two weeks of the season had been scheduled to start before then. The TSSAA has been working with Lee's office to get high school sports reclassified and thus allow them to have contact during practices.

As it stands now, the TSSAA is hoping to start contact practices Monday as originally planned. If teams start by Aug. 3, they still could start the season on time. For every week after Aug. 3 that teams can't practice, the hybrid plan allows for TSSAA to alter the regular season and playoff schedule.

The approved hybrid plan would be used only if the season can't start as scheduled.

The board also voted on a girls soccer contingency plan that called for the season to begin Sept. 7, with the postseason beginning Nov. 11-14, should the season not be able to start on time. Teams that don't play a maximum number of games and are eliminated from the postseason could play extra games.

"Clearly, sports will look different this year," TSSAA Executive Director Bernard Childress said during the meeting. "We have to be flexible and understand that we're in a unique situation. We're trying to make the best decision for young people."

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In the hybrid football model, teams must complete an acclimation period and three weeks of practice before any competition. As the calendar progresses, region games will be moved to a later date and replace open dates or nonregion games as necessary.

For example, if contact practice doesn't begin by Aug. 3, five region games would be affected in Week 1 and pushed back to Weeks 7-10, depending on open dates or nonregion games. If contact practice doesn't begin by Aug. 10, there would be 13 games affected in Week 2.

The board also passed a motion of safety guidelines that will be implemented throughout the fall sports seasons and will affect all sports, cheerleading and band as well as others involved in those activities.

Included in those guidelines:

- Players, coaches and personnel will have to take a temperature check prior to practice every day. Any person with a temperature 100.4 or higher will be required to go home immediately and cannot return without a negative COVID-19 test or verification from a doctor that the temperature wasn't a cause of COVID-19.
- No coach, player or personnel can compete without a COVID-19 questionnaire completed.
- There will be no scrimmages against other teams, jamborees or seven-on-seven contests for all fall sports. Scrimmages must be limited to intrasquad.
- Fans entering a facility must have temperatures taken (with exception given to children 2 and younger). The same guidelines that are in place for players and coaches remain. Temperature checklists must be posted prominently.
- Member schools must require fans to wear face coverings while attending events.
- Concession stands will not be prohibited but will be discouraged, with options that would ensure social distancing recommended.
- Coaches must complete a NHFS COVID-19 course, which will be provided free.
- While no exact figure was set, schools were urged to offer limited seating (from a third to a quarter capacity) during events, posting areas that were not available.

A motion also passed that any team not able to play a postseason contest because of COVID-19 would forfeit. Any regular-season games with that scenario would be considered no-contests.

Virtual schooling also was addressed, with the board approving a motion to allow students who were attending school virtually to still be able to participate in athletics.

Childress acknowledged that players, coaches and fans are anxious about a definite start date to football but the organization was clearly in favor of the hybrid plan prior to the vote.

"Coaches and teams can't do anything other than they're doing right now anyway (with the governor's restrictions)," he said.

He also said there was "no chess match" going on between the TSSAA and the governor's office and that the two were working "hand-in-hand" on when to be able to begin football and girls soccer.