

KSHSAA proposes delay for winter sports



The 2020-21 winter sports season in Kansas could be delayed or reduced depending on the vote at the Nov. 24 Kansas State High School Activities Association Board of Directors meeting

During the KSHSAA Executive Board meeting Wednesday the board reviewed data on the impact of COVID-19 on activity programs around the state due to the rising number of positive cases and impact on the health care system.

The board unanimously approved a proposal from the KSHSAA staff to suspend competitions until Jan. 15, 2021 and extend the winter moratorium. That proposal is now in front of the KSHSAA Board of Directors, who will vote on the issue at 1 p.m. on Nov. 24. The board of directors has members from every league across the state.

One of those board of directors, Paola High School principal Jeff Hines, was caught off-guard by the news.

"I consider myself pretty up to date when it comes to issues with KSHSAA, but I had no idea this was happening yesterday," Hines said. "I was in an administrator meeting that started at 10 a.m. and at 10:01 I received an email from KSHSAA with the executive board agenda for a meeting that had already started. This is a pretty important issue and I wanted to speak at the board meeting, but was told I couldn't because the meeting had already started."

“I asked someone at KSHSAA why the agenda was posted sooner, and they said it was posted last week. I have searched the internet and I couldn’t find it. I have no doubt that they did post somewhere, but they need to make it more accessible so there can be more discussion on the issue. I was surprised the issue came up.”

The proposal which will be put up for a vote is as follows:

- Delay competitions for all winter activities until Friday, January 15.
- Allow virtual competition only in Debate and Scholars Bowl.
- Winter activity practice may continue where appropriate to do so through December 22. All KSHSAA risk mitigation protocols strictly enforced.
- Extend Winter Moratorium. Dec. 23 – Jan. 3; practices to resume Jan. 4; restrictions eliminate contact between coach/athlete/school and no school facility use.
- Tentative resumption of competition on January 15.
- No fans for competition, January 15-28.
- Limited fans Jan. 29 through remainder of winter competitions.
- Mandatory universal masking with exception to athletes in competition and officials during live action.
- No invitational tournaments.

High School Competition Limits:

- Basketball maximum 13 games per team.
- Bowling maximum 8 days per team/individual.
- Swimming and Diving maximum 6 competitions per athlete.

- Wrestling maximum 12 events, 20 competition point max.

Middle School Restrictions:

- No competition in December, practice only.
- No competition Jan. 1 – Jan. 14
- No events with more than three schools participating.
- Strongly encourage skill development.
- Strongly encourage intramural play only.
- Limit two fans per player starting Jan. 15.

As far as how the board of directors will vote on the issue, Hines isn't quite sure how it will go, but he doesn't believe the executive board was trying to sneak the issue past anyone.

"You can have two thoughts on the issue," Hines said. "One, all of the executive board members think delaying winter sports is a great idea. That is an option, I guess. Or two, all of the members thought this issue was too big for them to decide on and wanted to make sure to get input from all its members and allowing them to make that decision. I tend to think that is what they are doing here."

"Will there be some people that vote yes to delay sports? Yeah I think there will be, just because of the situation their districts are in, but I tend to think a majority of them will vote no. Just as far as how I will be voting, I will vote no because I think that each school board should be able to decide whether or not to have winter sports. They know their district better than anyone. That is what we did for the fall and I believe the same thing should happen here."

Louisburg wrestling coach Bobby Bovaird understands the concern with the rising number of COVID-19 cases across the state, but he knows there will also be an impact on the

student athletes if these activities are delayed.

"I totally understand why KSHSAA is considering taking action, but it worries me because a delay in starting competition could put us on the path to canceling the winter season altogether," Bovaird said. "There have been wrestling tournaments happening across the nation since mid-July, and there have been very few cases traced back to the tournaments themselves. Coaches, wrestlers, officials, and tournament directors are taking precautions, and I hope that we're able to continue doing what they've been doing.

"I'm afraid that a reduction in the number of competitions allowed would only further harm the kids in the sport. I get it, though. Covid-19 is real and we're constantly reacting to it and rethinking how we can best protect our kids' health. While we may be protecting kids and their families from the potential of infection, we would also be taking away opportunities where kids can learn invaluable lessons and come together as a team to bond in ways that you can't get through the classroom, and we would be doing some considerable harm to their mental health."

KSHSAA's decision to potentially delay winter sports came on the same day Gov. Laura Kelly issued a new executive order on face masks after Kansas reported more than 5,800 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday.

Since the news broke, Hines has been hearing from people all over the area, who are voicing their concerns.

"There are a lot of people who are worried that their kids' season might not happen, and I get that, but I would say that people need to temper their venom at the state association," Hines said. "I think it's is great that people are contacting their board of directors and letting people know their feelings, and we want to hear from those who are concerned. At the end of the day, I believe they will do the right thing for

these kids.”

As for Louisburg High School itself, administrators will be ready to implement any rules necessary as they hope the students get to play a full season.

“My reaction was to the kids and coaches it would affect who look forward to sports and saw their peers and themselves play in the fall with accommodations, only to be potentially denied their opportunity for a full season,” Louisburg activities director Michael Pickman said. “I understand the reasoning of the KSHSAA board, but I also understand the views of those who don’t want to see any changes. Luckily it is in the discussion phase and perhaps they will find a way for the kids to play while implementing some guidelines for keeping it safe, such as no fans.

“Whether Dec. 4 or Jan. 15 as proposed for starting competitions, we are still going to work to make it a safe environment for all and to limit risk. I am not in the medical field, so I won’t pretend to know if the delay will help lower the numbers. If it passes, then I hope that it does. Still, we won’t have a cure and will have the same need to implement safety protocol Jan. 15 as we would Dec. 4.”

“I want our students to have the opportunity to play and play safely, so my main concern right now is that the policies the district and athletic department have put in place are well thought out and followed,” Pickman added. “I think if we commit to following safety practices, we can still slow the spread regardless of the results of next week’s discussion and decisions by the KSHSAA board.”