

OSAA moves back start to February, keeps three-season plan

Altered calendar shortens seasons to six weeks; football practices begin Feb. 8 with first games scheduled for March 1

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In a much-anticipated move, the OSAA on Monday decided to push back the start of its sports seasons as it continues to navigate the COVID-19 crisis.

The executive board moved to adopt a three-season plan with six-week seasons, starting with fall sports contests March 1 and followed by spring (April 12) and winter (May 17). The seasons include an “opt-in culminating week,” an option for postseason competition.

Fall sports practices are scheduled to begin Feb. 22, except for football, which will start Feb. 8. Spring and winter practices begin April 5 and May 10, respectively.

“It’s a moving target,” OSAA executive director **Peter Weber** said of altering the calendar. “We needed to make a decision. I think the board made the right decision.”

The board voted in August for a plan that opened with winter sports practices Dec. 28, hopeful that state guidance would allow for schools to return to in-person learning. But virus cases have increased throughout the fall, with 25 of the 36 counties – and all but 42 member schools – currently in the “extreme-risk” category.

“All of our conversations with the Oregon Health Authority, and following the news, it appears that the models are showing that things are going to get worse before they get better,” Weber said. “As we’re looking to provide as much time as possible to lower case counts -- and get counties out of the extreme-risk level, if possible -- we thought that this timeline made sense.”

Considering many districts end their first semester in early February, Weber said that moving the start to late February is potentially a good fit for schools that could return to in-person learning. Also, the weather later in February would better accommodate the outdoor fall sports.

The previous plan had seven-week seasons, plus the culminating week. The new plan calls for six-week seasons that include the culminating week.

“Obviously, they’re shorter seasons, but they also provide three distinct seasons and continue an opportunity for all kids to be involved, hopefully,” Weber said. “It’s shorter than we would like, and not as soon as we would like, but we feel like it’s realistic and something that we can put into place.”

The board also considered a two-season plan with nine-week seasons. In that plan, the first season (February to April) would have included fall sports, golf and swimming, and the second season (April to June) would have had spring sports, basketball and wrestling.

Ultimately, the board believed that stacking sports would have created too much difficulty for smaller schools.

“While there was some support for the idea that there would be longer seasons, and provide some flexibility, in the end, the stacking of sports on top of one another was difficult for the board to move beyond,” Weber said.

The board also approved extending the current Season 1 period, which lifts restrictions for out of season coaching, through Feb. 21.



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