

IHSA: Basketball Is On, Wrestling Moved To Summer, Basketball Ruling Defies Governor's Guidelines Released On Tuesday

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SPRINGFIELD - The Illinois High School Association made what many viewed as an unexpected decision Wednesday afternoon that the basketball season can start as scheduled. It is an unexpected move that directly contradicts the guidelines Gov. J.B. Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Public Health outlined on Tuesday.

The IHSA Board voted to move the sport of wrestling from the winter season to the summer season, which will run from April 19 to June 26, 2021. The board approved the IHSA's winter sport guidance for all low-risk sports, which includes boys swimming and diving, cheerleading, dance, boys and girls bowling, and girls gymnastics. The board took action to follow the guidance of the IHSA Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) and will allow Boys and Girls Basketball to begin practices, per IHSA Return to Activities 2.0, on November 16. Basketball contests can begin on November 30 within an Illinois COIVD Region or within a conference.

Gov. Pritzker said the school districts now know the rules that have been set.

"The IHSA may have their views but school districts know what the rules are," Pritzker said. "It is unfortunate they may be taking on legal liability if they moved ahead with what the state has previously set as mitigation standards."

The IHSA said in addition, as a part of the mitigation plan, masks will be worn by all players, coaches, and officials during play. Boys and girls basketball teams will follow team limitations allowing a maximum of 31 games. It will become a local school

decision to determine if a school will allow their basketball teams to participate following the guidelines developed by the SMAC.

The IHSA Board released the following statement regarding the basketball action:

“The Illinois High School Association Board of Directors made the decision today to continue with the IHSA basketball season as scheduled in 2020-21. In August, the board slated basketball to take place from November to February based on the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) assigning a medium risk level to the sport. The IHSA Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) offered additional mitigations, such as masks during play and social distancing on benches, that the SMAC believed would allow basketball to be played safely.

The high school basketball season was potentially put on hold on October 27, when Governor Pritzker announced that IDPH had changed basketball’s risk level from medium risk to high risk.

After diligent discussion, the IHSA Board said it has made the decision today to follow the recommendation of the IHSA SMAC as it relates to basketball. The IHSA Board remains considerate of rising COVID-19 cases in Illinois and understands the importance of adhering to safety guidelines for the good of all citizens. However, the Board has not been presented with any causal evidence that rising COVID-19 cases make basketball more dangerous to play by the IDPH or any other health organization nationally or internationally. On the contrary, the IHSA has been looking to bordering states who have sponsored both medium risk and high-risk sports in the fall that have noted a low incident rate of COVID-19 spread.

"Instead, we will require all IHSA basketball teams to adhere to those SMAC mitigations, and allow local school officials to make decisions related to participation," the IHSA Board said Wednesday.

"Mounting challenges, from increased mental health issues among our students to a shrinking calendar that limits our ability to move sports seasons this school year, were instrumental in this decision to move forward with basketball as scheduled," the IHSA said. "We see our students regularly leaving the state to play sports, or covertly continuing to play locally. Students can be better protected in the high school setting, and the board remains steadfast that playing under IHSA rules and SMAC mitigation is the safest way to conduct athletics at this juncture.

"Illinois is a large and diverse state, and the IHSA membership is reflective of that. We understand that this decision will impact each high school and district differently. Some schools that remain in remote learning may not be able to start winter sports on time,

and we feel for those in that situation. However, we have also learned that we cannot continue to look down the road to a season that may never come."

The IHSA continued with this statement: "Contact days for our teams this fall have been an incredible boon to our students' well-being. We fear for the mental health of students who attempt to traverse a long winter with no athletic outlet available. So much about dealing with this virus has been learned in the past eight months, and this decision will grant the membership the opportunity to apply that knowledge during their basketball season."

The IHSA said each member of the IHSA Board volunteered for this position because they are passionate about high school sports and activities, and the positive impact they have on our students' physical and mental health."