



# **Coaches Happy IHSA Gives Green Light For Basketball, But Many Questions Still Remain**

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer  
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EDWARDSVILLE/ALTON - Many area boys and girls basketball coaches are happy about the recent announcement from the Illinois High School Association that gave the green light for basketball during the upcoming 2020-21 winter season, but there are still questions about how the season would be conducted - and in some cases, if there'll be a season at all, due to the recent spike in COVID-19 cases statewide that has caused much concern.

In a special meeting of the IHSA Board of Directors on Oct. 28, the Board, taking its advice from the organization's Sports Medicine Advisory Committee, and approved basketball to begin formal practices on Nov. 16, and games to begin Nov. 30, with each school being allowed a maximum of 31 games. Games would be played behind closed doors, with no fans allowed, and masks would be mandatory for all players, coaches and officials, along with all social distancing rules to be enforced. All games would be played within either a school's local COVID region or within their conferences. The local school districts were given the final say whether or not the basketball season would be played.

The IHSA Board decision came the day after the Illinois Department of Public Health moved basketball from a medium-risk to a high-risk sport, with the support of Governor J.B. Pritzker. In a statement issued after the meeting, the IHSA Board cited the SMAC recommendations in accordance with basketball.

"The board remains considerate of rising COVID-19 cases in Illinois," the statement read, "and understands the importance of adhering to safety guidelines for the good of all citizens. However, the Board has not been presented 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."

The IHSA board also cited neighboring states that have allowed both medium- and high-risk sports to be played this fall that have not had any significant increase of COVID-19 cases because of playing such sports, and also cited protecting the mental health of the state's student-athletes as key factors in making their decision. Boys and girls bowling, competitive cheerleading and dance, boys swimming, and girls gymnastics will also be played this winter, with boys wrestling being moved to the IHSA summer season.

Locally, Edwardsville head coach Dustin Battas and his team are ready to move along and start formal practice in mid-November unless they are told otherwise.

Battas said that his team will continue to strive to keep the virus at bay, and will also continue to go by the guidelines and safety rules concerning COVID.

"We will continue to do our best to stay COVID free," Battas said, "with social distancing, and we'll keep wearing our masks. It's not ideal, but our guys are willing to do whatever we need to do to be able to play, and we'll try to find other ways to include our fans."

There are still questions remaining about how things will be going about, and the IHSA's decision to allow basketball despite the governor's and IDPH's position on the sport still raises many doubts.



"We really didn't get the OK," said Alton boys head coach Dana Morgan, "because the governor pushed us back to winter. The governor, IDPH and IHSA need to form a plan to work for the kids. Until that, it's confusion, and it's at a cost to the kids."

Morgan also said that he'll go by whatever the Alton School District decides to do, and is very confident in his district's leadership.

"It's a district-by-district situation, and I can only go by the district I'm in," Morgan said. "And the Alton School District's done a fantastic job of keeping us safe, with great standards and criteria to follow. And I know the district's looking out for the kids, so I'm going to follow our criteria and standards, and the administration of our district."

Battas is looking forward to the start of the season and is glad that the Tigers' players will have the chance to play, especially the seniors.

"Especially our seniors," Battas said. "They're really eager to get going and play their senior season. A lot of guys have worked hard for the last four years."