

IHSA Sets Parameters For Contact Days, Intends To Play All Sports In Remainder Of 2020-2021 School Year

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BLOOMINGTON - The Illinois High School Association set parameters for contact days in non-winter sports, moved girls badminton from the spring to the winter season, and said it would stay in its intentions to play all sports in the remainder of the 2020-21 school year during the Board of Directors monthly meeting held on Monday.

The Board made the decision to move badminton to the winter season in order to balance out time and space for the school gyms for the spring season. Currently, no local schools offer girls badminton, and is played mainly in the Chicago area.

"Given its status as a low-risk sport, we believe we can safely conduct badminton in the winter as soon as the current mitigations are lifted," said IHSA Executive Director Craig Anderson in a statement issued following the meeting. "The feedback we have heard from our schools is that this is an optimal time to conduct badminton, as they look at balancing sports and facilities throughout the remainder of the school year."

Because of Tier 3 mitigations involving the COVID-19 pandemic, the start of the winter sports season, which includes boys and girls basketball, boys and girls bowling, girls cheer and dance, boys swimming and diving, and now girls badminton, was postponed until after the start of 2021. All low-risk sports, which includes all but basketball, are set to begin once the mitigations are lifted, but the basketball season will still be on hold.

The Board also voted to allow contact days for all non-winter sports, also once the mitigations are lifted by the Illinois Department of Public Health and the office of Governor J.B. Pritzker. Contact days are limited to six hours per student-athlete per sport every week and can include practices, drills, and scrimmages that are allowed by IDPH guidelines. Any contact or competition between school teams, both in and out of the state of Illinois, will not be permitted.

"The board felt that it was important for the physical and mental health of our student-athletes to resume contact days for all out-of-season sports as soon as the IDPH deems it safe," Anderson said, "Winter sports are not included, as we anticipate all low-risk winter sports to begin their seasons at the same time. Basketball remains the outlier in the equation. We hope to be able to conduct basketball during the winter season, but if we cannot, basketball will be provided the same contact day opportunities as we determine where the basketball season fits best in the remainder of the school year."

The Board of Directors plans to meet with representatives of both the Governor's office and the IDPH shortly after the start of 2021 in order to develop a timeline for the winter season. A special meeting of the Board will afterward be called to finalize the winter, spring, and summer sporting seasons' schedules.

The Board also renewed its commitment to making every effort to play all sports for the remainder of the school year. In the early stages of the pandemic, the IHSA canceled the remainder of the boys' basketball tournaments, with the Class 1A and 2A semifinals and finals, along with the Class 3A and 4A sectional finals set for the weekend the tournament was canceled. The IHSA also eventually canceled the entire spring sporting season as well.

"The Board reiterated on Monday that they plan to do everything in their power to provide a season for every IHSA sport in 2020-21," Anderson said. "There have been no cancellations of any sports thus far. The Board appreciated the patience and flexibility of the IHSA membership, and remains optimistic, especially as vaccines are being administered, that we will return to conducting IHSA sports in early 2021."