

Coach Martin, Edwardsville Football Team, Remain Optimistic Of Spring Season

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - The 2020-21 school year has not been the easiest of years for anyone, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to wreak havoc locally, statewide, nationwide and around the world. The pandemic has affected the Illinois High School Association greatly, with the organization canceling the remainder of the 2020 boys basketball tournaments and the entire 2020 spring sporting season. The IHSA had already moved many sport schedules, including moving football from the fall to the spring.

Even though the pandemic has affected the football schedule at Edwardsville High School, the Tigers have been pressing forward to prepare for the spring 2021 season, and there may be light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. The recent introduction of a COVID vaccine, along with the news of a second vaccine that may be ready for emergency use soon, has made many people hopeful for the end of the pandemic.

"I'm encouraged," said Tigers head coach Matt Martin in an interview. "The vaccine is out and people are receiving treatment. Hopefully, Operation Warp Speed will get it out to as many people as possible and herd immunity will start to develop. When that happens, I think the IHSA and Governor (J.B.) Pritzker will allow us to play sports in the spring."

The fact that the second vaccine would be fast-track approved for emergency use is also very encouraging news, as well.

"From what I understand, the second vaccine is not as sensitive as far as having to be kept so cold," Martin said, "so that might speed up the process even more. So I feel the key to this whole thing, at least from what I've seen, is going to be about getting the vaccine out."

Martin's players have been doing very well throughout the pandemic and continue to get their work in and stay positive throughout.

"I think they're doing pretty well," Martin said. "We're actually making gains in the weight room. I think our kids have been positive. It's been a little frustrating that we've had a setback in the last two-and-a-half weeks. We've been all remote in school, so we haven't been able to lift weights like we'd like to so that's a little frustrating. The opportunity for preparation isn't where we'd like it to be."

The Edwardsville School District has been on an exclusively remote learning schedule since before Thanksgiving. The all-remote learning has affected the players both academically and athletically.

"It affects it tremendously," Martin said. "I don't think the grades are the same, I don't think off-season preparations are the same. Our kids don't have the facilities or the resources to train like they need to be training, especially with cold weather setting in. That's going to provide us even more limitations."

Still, Martin remains optimistic about playing the season and feels every player deserves the chance to play, especially the seniors.

"I think every kid deserves an opportunity to play, especially seniors," Martin said. "I just think there's something special about senior year football. I hope our seniors get a chance to experience it."

When asked about how optimistic he feels about playing the season, Martin didn't hesitate an answer.

"50-50," Martin said with a smile and laugh.

Assuming that the season will be played, Martin is looking forward to working with both his players and coaching staff.

"Just competing," Martin said. "Just being together. I do enjoy being around the coaches and I enjoy being around the kids. I like that bond, working together and trying to help each other improve. That's fun for me. That's why I'm in it."