

IHSA Keeps Sports On Hold For At Least Two More Weeks, Contact Days Set To Begin On IDPH Approval

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
January 14 2021 9:19 AM



BLOOMINGTON - The Illinois High School Association Board of Directors, in its regular monthly meeting on Wednesday, voted to allow contact days in non-season sports, per the approval of the Illinois Department of Public Health mitigations and local school board approval.

The IHSA Board decided to keep sports on hold until a special meeting, scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 27, to decide on a framework and options for scheduling for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year.

"The IHSA acknowledges the immense mental, emotional and physical strain that a lack of contact with school programs is causing Illinois high school student-athletes," said Executive Director Craig Anderson as part of a press release that followed the meeting. "It is our intention that these contact days provide sport-specific training under the leadership of high school coaches. This is an effort to provide a viable sports option to high school athletes, given the growing number of student-athletes opting for higher risk opportunities within the state and across state lines."

Low-risk sports, such as boys and girls bowling, cheerleading, dance, girls gymnastics, and boys swimming and diving, are set to begin once state authorities approve their activities, and the seasons will begin once the calendar for these sports is approved by the Board in its special meeting in two weeks.

In a joint statement issued after the meeting, the IHSA Board said that what happens in the next two weeks will go a long way in determining when sports, which have been on pause since Nov. 20, after the successful conduction of the fall season, will resume statewide.

"We realize that there is a desire for finality on a sports schedule for 2020-21," the Board said in its statement, "however, we did not believe it would be prudent to lock ourselves into a schedule at a time when IHSA schools are unable to conduct any sports. Gov. (J.B.) Pritzker has said we have hope that low-risk sports may be permitted in certain regions of the state as early as this Friday (Jan. 15). With that in mind, it seems like February seems like a realistic timeline to resume sports statewide. We expect the events of the next two weeks will go a long way in informing our opinion on which scheduling option we decide to proceed with.

"We recognize that if no sports have resumed by February, season lengths could be impacted in other sports," the statement continued, "and we may need to take a longer look at the likelihood of true seasons being conducted in high-risk sports this year. Our overall goal remains unchanged, as we hope to conduct all IHSA sports during the remainder of the school year calendar. Please know that we see and read many of the comments and messages from student-athletes, coaches and parents, and that we are doing everything we can to try and bring IHSA sports back within the current parameters we are working in."

Anderson said the IHSA continues to work with the Governor's office, the IDPH and other agencies in order to bring back high school sports in the state as soon as possible.

"We remain collaborative in our efforts with the IDPH and the Governor's office," Anderson said in the press release. "We are trying to do our part in fighting the pandemic, while simultaneously seeking safe participation opportunities for our student-athletes. We understand the real mental toll this pause in athletics is having on Illinois high school student-athletes. We believe that school-based athletic participation is better regulated, making it the safest participation option for our students, and more data continues to emerge supporting that stance. We will continue to share that information with state leadership in hopes that we can work together to provide participation opportunities for young people in our state."