

Preseason Practice For Fall Sports Begins Monday

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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The opening day of fall sporting practices at the Riverbender.com area schools occurs on Monday, and it's one of the surest signs around the area that summer will soon be over as teams begin preparations for the upcoming seasons in football, boys and girls golf, boys and girls cross country, boys soccer, girls swimming, girls tennis, girls volleyball and girls field hockey. The first events of the 2023-24 school year occur in golf, as the Alton Kickoff Classic girls tournament will be held at Rolling Meadows Golf Club on Aug. 12, with the boys season getting underway with the Hickory Stick Invitational, being held Aug. 14 at Belk Park Golf Course in Wood River.

Football practices starts today, with the season beginning on Aug. 25, with Edwardsville hosting Jackson, Mo. in a rematch of an opening day classic last season which saw the Tigers win 44-37 in double overtime, breaking a long home winning streak for the Indians, a traditional power in southeast Missouri. Meanwhile, Alton opens up at Cahokia, Carlinville is at Litchfield, Piasa Southwestern goes to Gillespie, Highland hosts Breese Central, Granite City is at O'Fallon, Greenville plays at Staunton, Triad hosts Mattoon, Marquette Catholic will host Civic Memorial at Public School Stadium, Collinsville plays at Belleville East, Jersey plays at Roxana, Metro-East Lutheran travels to South Fork-Edinburgh-Morrisonville, Carrollton is at Beardstown, Hardin Calhoun hosts Jacksonville Routh Catholic and White Hall North Greene is at home to Camp Point Central. Opens the next day, Aug. 26, will have East Alton-Wood River playing

at St. Louis Gateway STEM and East St. Louis taking on Chicago Mt. Carmel Catholic in a game at Hancock Stadium at Illinois State University in Bloomington-Normal.



Three new head coaches - longtime Edwardsville assistant Kelsey Pickering, former Alton head coach Eric Dickerson at Marquette and Caleb Williams at Jersey - will debut at their various schools, while both Collinsville and Granite City will be joining the South Seven conference on a trial basis for the next three years in football, with possible inclusion in the league at the end of the trial period. Another significant change will be the addition of Belleville Althoff Catholic to the Gateway Metro Conference as the Crusaders leave the South Seven to join the GMC.

The first big cross country meet occurs Sept. 2 with the Granite City Invitational at Wilson Park in Granite, while the Metro Cup showcase starts off the soccer season. Other sports have various opening dates, with all sports leading to the IHSA playoffs, beginning in October and November. The fall season ends on Thanksgiving weekend with the football finals Nov. 24-25 as the finals return to Hancock Stadium for the first time since 1998. The finals will be held at Illinois State for the next five seasons.