

High School Sports Postseason Competition Returns Across Country

By Dr. Karissa Niehoff on October 28, 2020

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“Going to State” is the mantra of high school sports teams as their seasons begin. While the opportunity to simply participate is the biggest thrill, playing in a state championship contest is a close second.

In a normal year, the chance to play in a state championship is usually dependent upon the team’s success during the regular season. Unfortunately, in the COVID-19 world, “opportunity” has had more to do with the Coronavirus than a team’s prowess.

Fortunately, that opportunity finally returned this month on a large-scale basis for the first time since March, when 34 of the 51 NFHS member associations were unable to complete their state basketball tournaments, followed by the cancellation of spring sports in all states.

Although Iowa was the first state to return to play after the March shutdown with summer baseball and softball seasons and state tournaments in late July and early August, the excitement of postseason competition resumed in many other states earlier this month.

Among the state tournaments that have been completed this fall are boys soccer in North Dakota, South Dakota and Idaho; girls soccer in South Dakota, Utah and Idaho; girls volleyball in Mississippi, Oklahoma and Tennessee; and cross country in Alaska, Colorado, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Utah. In some of these events, there were more precautions than in a normal year, but the chance for a state title was back!

Later this week, girls volleyball tournaments will conclude in Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kansas, New Hampshire and Utah, and 19 others are set to finish in November.

The NFHS Football Completion Chart shows that 30 of the 35 states that were able to continue with football this fall amid the pandemic will conduct state championships, with the other five states ending postseason play at the regional or sectional levels. While some of the states reduced the number of regular-season games, and some teams or individuals may have been ineligible due to quarantines, the overall perseverance of student-athletes, coaches and parents has been amazing.

Most of the state football championships will be held in November and December, with North Dakota crowning the first champion on November 13 and Texas the last January 14-16. The Texas University Interscholastic League had to push its large-school championship to January after a late start to the season.

The remaining states have plans to start football and other traditional fall sports during the winter or spring months and, at this point, all are hoping to stage state championships on dates yet to be determined.

While some student-athletes in traditional fall sports will have to wait a bit longer for their opportunity, we are pleased that, slowly but surely, the highlights of actual high school sports competition – and state championships – will be making headlines rather than the latest list of cancellations due to the Coronavirus.

Many of the state associations that will be staging football championships in the coming weeks will be faced with limitations on the number of spectators. While we hope fans will be permitted, the NFHS Network (www.NFHSNetwork.com) is a great alternative in most states as parents and other fans will still be able to watch the events live on the Internet.

Unfortunately, the outlook is not as bright for our 51 member state associations. Since these associations are heavily dependent on revenue from state tournaments, those that were unable to host state basketball tournaments and all spring sports events, and now with the potential of loss of gate receipts from fall championships, are facing severe financial challenges.

Working day and night with governors, state departments of education and public health, and local school districts, these leaders of our state associations have done a phenomenal job of balancing the need for these vital programs against the safety concerns related to the Coronavirus. Their No. 1 goal has been keeping programs alive so that students continue to have the opportunity to participate.

Now, it is time for leaders in communities throughout our nation to support and assist these 51 associations to ensure they have the means to continue operations – and continue to provide these once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for high school students.

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