



The NFHS Voice



Fall, Winter, Spring Sports Being Held Simultaneously Across Country

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff, NFHS Executive Director

 @KarissaNFHS

At the end of March 2020, high school sports and performing arts were grounded – victims of a novel coronavirus that was wreaking havoc throughout the world.

NFHS member state high school associations were in the concluding stages of winter sports championships when the pandemic struck last spring. Although 17 states were able to complete basketball championships, student-athletes in 34 states were not able to experience the “madness” of March.

And approximately three million participants in spring sports and performing arts were unable to be involved in their favorite activities. Student-athletes in baseball, softball, track and field, lacrosse, golf, tennis and other spring

sports and activities remained on the sidelines and in remote learning situations as schools shut down.

Fast forward one year and the landscape is looking better with each passing day. After months and months of working with state government, health and education leaders on return-to-play plans, high school sports and performing arts programs are on the road to recovery. While the level of return to competition has varied across the country, activity participants have been able to return to competition in every state – and students in the District of Columbia are slated to return April 1.

Although many states delayed the return to winter sports until after January 1, 46 states have offered basketball this school year, with two more – Oregon and Washington – set to begin in May. Nevada cancelled its season earlier this year, and Hawaii and the District of Columbia have not established starting dates.

According to the [NFHS Winter Sports Seasons Guide](#), 43 states have conducted – or will be conducting – state championships in basketball – a great improvement from the 17 that were able to finish last year.

The efforts of individuals involved in wrestling have been even more remarkable. A sport that many figured would be grounded during the pandemic, 37 states have been able to start regular-season wrestling, with only four states having to cancel the entire season (Connecticut, Maine, Nevada and Vermont). Five additional states – New Mexico, Illinois, North Carolina, Washington and Oregon – are due to start competition in April and May.

While some states have been able to start and finish wrestling on time this year, other states have had to employ more creative measures to offer the sport.

In New Jersey, where the start of the season was delayed until March 16, several schools have conducted dual meets outdoors in an attempt to provide a safer environment.

All 15 states that sponsor boys ice hockey were able to play regular-season contests this year after being grounded last year, and nine states were able to conduct state championships.

In what has to be one of the strangest twists of this once-in-a-lifetime (we hope) season of high school sports, 17 states are playing football as April begins – a new take on the concept of “spring football.” Eleven of those states had their seasons shifted from the traditional fall schedule, and six other states provided an alternative spring season for schools that were unable to play in the fall.

The 11 states that are conducting their primary season now are North Carolina, New Mexico, New York, Illinois, California, Oregon, Massachusetts, Washington, Rhode Island, Virginia and Nevada. Although only North Carolina, Rhode Island and Virginia will have state championships, kudos to all of these states for their perseverance in providing opportunities for competition.

Perhaps the individuals most grateful this year are participants in baseball, softball, track and field, lacrosse, golf, tennis and other spring sports. Although competition in these sports had commenced in a few states last year before the pandemic struck, most of these student-athletes never had the opportunity to play their chosen sport last year.

Although the start of traditional spring sports has been delayed in several states with the shifting of the entire sports calendar, it is anticipated that these sports will be offered in all states. In some cases, baseball, softball, and track and field will not finish until early July as the dogged determination of state

associations to provide opportunities for everyone has been unending throughout this school year.

With the COVID-19 vaccine becoming available to all adults in many states, the outlook for return to normalcy in high school sports and performing arts grows brighter each week.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is in her third year as executive director of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is the first female to head the national leadership organization for high school athletics and performing arts activities and the sixth full-time executive director of the NFHS. She previously was executive director of the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference for seven years.