

Spring sports season in Oregon canceled

■ Athletic directors, coaches express disappointment for student athletes

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — La Grande head baseball coach Parker McKinley still was trying to process the news he and anyone else tied to high school sports in Oregon received late Wednesday afternoon: The spring season is over.

"I'm kind of speechless," he said.

Gov. Kate Brown's announcement Wednesday that Oregon would extend its statewide school closure through the end of the school year to continue to slow the spread of the coronavirus also brought an end to the high school sports spring season. Following the governor's announcement, the Oregon School Activities Association delivered its own, canceling the remainder of the spring sports season and the spring sports championships.

"I knew it was coming with the schools shutting down," Union athletic director Chris Dunlap said. "There was no way.... My personal thought was that I felt like it was coming. I think there was hope that we would be able to salvage something and do a short season. It seems like how things have evolved with the COVID-19 situation we're in, it became clear it wasn't going to happen."

Brown had closed schools to on-site learning through April 28, which left open a window of hope that if in-person learning were allowed following the moratorium it could result in a spring sports season, albeit a brief one.



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

An empty Sam Marcum Field, the home of the La Grande High School softball team, is shown in March. The spring sports season was officially canceled late Wednesday by OSAA.

"Today's heart wrenching decision is difficult for all members of the OSAA family," OSAA executive director Peter Weber said in a press release. "We empathize with students and school communities, especially our graduating seniors, but recognize that these cancellations will allow our collective focus to remain where it's most needed at this time — on the health and safety of all Oregonians."

Elgin AD Jeff Rysdam said he, too, feared the news was coming, and said his disappointment was largely for the seniors who won't get to compete in the spring season. Elgin also was going to bring its softball team back in a junior varsity capacity and had high hopes for the track season.

"There's not much you can say, it's a mandate by the state. It is what it is," he said. "I got disappointed kids, I know that much."

McKinley said while the loss of the spring season is tough, he understands the reasons behind the move given the spread of the coronavirus throughout the world.

"It's so much bigger. I know what we have going on in our world right now is really important," he said.

There haven't been any athlete events in the state since March 12, when the original ruling from the state brought an abrupt end to the basketball season during the final week of the state tournament.

Dunlap's daughter, Ella, plays for La Grande and was in Forest Grove for the beginning of the tournament when it was canceled, so he knows the feeling of disappointment as an AD and a father.

"It's hitting me, too, in different ways," he said.

Dunlap added the season being officially over is "a letdown, a disappointment," and said students "gotta figure out some other way to fill that void at this time."

McKinley added there still are a lot of questions to be answered in the coming days and weeks, but he is trying to focus on how to take the next step — akin, he said, to taking another pitch in baseball.

"I try to process things quickly and try to figure out how to move forward," he said. "Something (may go) a direction you don't necessarily want it to go or expect it to go, but the next pitch is coming. How you respond to that is how you define your success. I'm ready for the next pitch."

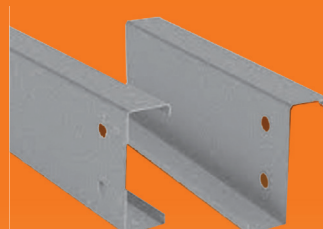
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