

OSAA sports season to start in January

Each sport will have a seven-week regular season and a ‘culminating week’

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

SALEM — High school sports in Oregon will not kick off until 2021.

The Oregon School Activities Association on Wednesday, Aug. 5, announced it has moved the fall season — including football — to a March start date. Winter sports will begin in January under the new schedule and spring sports will begin in May.

OSAA Executive Director Peter Weber said in putting together the calendar the executive board looked at what several other western states — Washington, California, and Nevada specifically — had done in laying out three distinct seasons and sought to do the same.

“The overlap would be limited as much as possible,” he said. “That was the first piece. Second part, wanting to keep fall sports together, winter sports together and spring sports together.”

Keeping the seasons intact, he said, was a goal so student-athletes would not have to choose one sport over the other.

The calendar change came after Oregon health officials announced a school reopening plan that has caused many schools — including La Grande — to make the decision to start the 2020-21 school year online. Large districts in the state have said it would be October or November at the earliest before they could resume in-person teaching.

Under the OSAA’s new calendar, there are four seasons — Season 1, Season 2, Season 3 and Season 4. Season 2 is for winter sports, 3 is for fall sports and 4 is for spring sports.

Season 1 is a period during the traditional fall season where the executive board decided to waive its usual out-of-season



Observer file photo

Blaine Shaw intercepts a pass for La Grande during a game against Baker in 2019. The OSAA announced Wednesday, Aug. 5, it has set a sports calendar for the 2020-21 season that will have traditional winter sports played in January and February, fall sports in March and April, and spring sports in May and June. The first football games would take place the week of March 15.

coaching policies. That will allow for sports participation from Aug. 17 through Dec. 27 at the discretion of individual school districts, which would need to adhere to state health guidelines.

Weber said the OSAA is awaiting guidance from the Oregon Department of Education on if it would consider allowing students to take part in activities while engaging in distance learning. He said he expects the requirement of students being in the classroom to take part in activities to continue this fall, which would mean schools would have to indeed reopen in person for athletics to resume.

“We’re still expecting some more guidance around sports,” he said. “One of the reasons we (chose) the plan we did is it put the flexibility in place either way.”

Union Athletic Director Chris Dunlap said having a set calendar allows everyone to begin to devise how they will approach the upcoming school year and sports season.

“I think the plan allows

schools to get set up and make a plan that is going to work, and then it still allows student-athletes to participate, have a purpose,” he said. “It gives kids goals (and) holds them accountable for their actions and grades.”

Dunlap said education remains the main priority, and added the emphasis will be on getting students in the classroom before taking a look at how the school will use Season 1. The plan could allow schools to even use Season 1 for competitions with other schools that also are open.

“We would entertain the possibility of treating the Season 1 like we would the summer, (with) summer league basketball or volleyball,” he said.

Elgin AD and football coach Jeff Rysdam said he is pleased the period of waiting to see what is planned is past.

“I can’t say that I’m disappointed,” he said. “When the announcement came out I sent a text to my team. One of my kids said it’s not exactly what

we wanted, but if we get a seven-game season and a playoff, let’s get ready.”

Under the new calendar, Season 2 will begin practices Dec. 28 and a seven-week regular season begins Jan. 11. Season 3 begins practice Feb. 22 and starts contests on March 8, with the exception of football, which would play its first games the week of March 15. And Season 4 practices will open on April 19 and begin games on May 3.

ONLINE

• For a look at the OSAA’s tentative schedule for high school sports, see this story at lagrandeobserver.com.

In Season 2, teams will be able to take part in eight swim meets, nine wrestling competitions and 14 basketball games. Season 3 will see seven football games, 10 soccer matches, nine cross-country meets and 14 playing dates for volleyball. In Season 4, baseball and softball will have 18 games, and there will be nine track meets, 12 playing dates for tennis and 14 nine-hole rounds for golf.

At the end of each seven-week season, there will be a one-week “culminating week.” In the press release, OSAA said the culminating week specifics will be laid out in the months ahead.

Weber said the executive board doesn’t know what the culminating week will look like, but it being just a week long doesn’t rule out the opportunity for students or teams to play for a championship, even though a possible tournament format would look vastly different.

“We talked about some different things,” he said. “A football contingency group said maybe that’s a bowl game. In other sports there could be some other opportunities.... Or it could be something different. It could be regional in manner.”

He noted that state restrictions on gathering

sizes could limit what would be allowed.

“I’m curious to see what they’re going to come up with,” Rysdam said.

The Season 2 culminating week is set for March 1. Season 3’s will be April 26, and May 3 for football. The Season 4 culminating week will take place June 21.

Dunlap’s hope is for a format that allows for a competition for a state title, but he added even having sports for the students — title opportunity or not — beats the hand they were dealt five months ago.

“If I could have my wishes come true, (there would be) some type of smaller state tournament where there is criteria for teams to qualify, and if we couldn’t do that, some type of district or regional tournament to have a reason for the league games to matter,” he said. “But if we’re having competition, that’s better than what we had last winter and spring. My biggest takeaway is there is hope for kids, hope for schools and opportunities for the seniors.”

Rysdam added the focus needs to shift to the academic side.

“Now that we got sports situated and figured out, let’s try and get the kids back in the classroom,” he said. “That should be the main thing.”



Photo by Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group

A billboard in Pendleton displays the phrase “Black Lives Matter.” A crowdfunding campaign covered the cost of the billboard, and now a similar effort is leading to a Black Lives Matter billboard in La Grande.

BILLBOARD

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School of Law and recently earned a master’s degree in music and vocal performance from the university.

Hawaii has a diverse population, she explained, and plenty of her friends in law school were involved in indigenous causes. Her experience in Hawaii with such a diverse population contrasted with life here.

“La Grande is very racially homogeneous. It’s rural, is not close to any big, progressive areas,” she said. “So I think people in La Grande feel like this stuff does not affect them, that racial injustice doesn’t affect them.”

She decided to get a Black Lives Matter billboard in La Grande after

seeing one in Pendleton.

Black Lives Matter supporters erected a billboard in the Round-Up City, and The Observer’s related newspaper, the East Oregonian, reported the story on what led to the public display. The Observer picked up that story and provided a link to it on Facebook. Carmichael was among the masses who saw the story due to social media.

Some of the comments on Facebook, she said, prompted her to take action.

She said her first call was to Meadow Outdoor Advertising, the company based in The Dalles that handles billboards in the Pacific Northwest. The company put her in touch with Paige Snively, a 29-year-old living in Chicago who originally is from Pilot Rock and helped organize the Pend-

leton campaign.

“I just told her thanks for the great ideas,” Carmichael said, “and she gave me a couple of tips moving forward, so here we are.”

No doubt the sign will anger some people, she said, but La Grande, and Oregon in general, has a racist past, and that needs to be confronted and reconciled.

“I hope the people who look at that sign and get angry about it, at least some of them will stop and consider why it makes them so angry and lead them to educate themselves,” Carmichael said, “and if not, at least it sparks the conversation.”

She said the hope is the sign will be up in the next few weeks. You can find information about the sign at gofundme.com.

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