

OSAA approves March 1 start for sports

By **BRIAN RATHBONE**
The Bulletin

SALEM — In one way or another, high school sports are set to return to competition starting March 1.

The executive board of the Oregon School Activities Association approved the start of soccer, cross-country and (partly) volleyball during a Monday, Feb. 8, Zoom meeting, while football players still are waiting for further guidelines from the Oregon Health Authority to determine if they can play games this winter and spring.

“That was a priority for the board,” Peter Weber, executive director of the OSAA, told The Bulletin. “Let those who can go, go. And those who can’t, provide alternative options.”

Those who can: Soccer and cross-country are allowed to start practicing Feb. 22, while questions remain about what the post-season will entail. Those questions will likely have more clarity following a Feb. 17 OSAA executive board meeting.

Those who cannot: Volleyball



EO Media Group, File Photo
La Grande’s Payton Cooper tries to elude a defender from The Dalles in the 2019 4A state semifinal high school football game in Hermiston. Football teams began official noncontact practices Monday, Feb. 8, but it is uncertain if the Oregon School Activities Association will allow tackle football in the next couple of weeks.

and football are waiting for more state guidelines to fully return.

Due to the state’s indoor restrictions, the start of the volleyball season could start on time, or some teams could elect to move their seasons to later in the year when their respective counties could move below the extreme-risk level.

As of now, with new county risk levels set to be released this week, roughly 50 schools have the option of starting on time due to being in a lower-, moderate- or high-risk county. Those in extreme-risk counties may have to play later in the spring. The board approved “change-of-season request forms” for volleyball.

Football teams began official noncontact practices Monday, but it is uncertain if tackle football will be allowed in the next couple of weeks.

Contact sports — football, basketball and wrestling — have been prohibited, thus making it impossible to play under the current guidelines.

During the Feb. 8 meeting, the OSAA made it clear that the

OHA would be releasing new, more lenient guidelines that could give contact sports a chance at returning.

“They can’t prohibit (the contact sports) any more (than they already are),” Weber said.

Football cannot be moved to a different season like volleyball and played past May 1 because that is too close to the start of the 2021 fall season. And given the uncertainty of the upcoming OHA guidelines, there is the possibility that parts of the state play non-contact 7-on-7 football while others play tackle, Weber said.

The OSAA has been providing information to the OHA showing how other states who did not play football in the fall — such as Illinois, New York and New Mexico — are approaching their plan to restart football safely. Still, the decision is left in the hands of the OHA and the governor’s office.

“I think this is better than not having any football at all,” said Curt Shelley, the 4A representative on the executive board and superintendent of the Tillamook School District.

Remembering the 1939 NCAA champion ‘Tall Firs’

Back in 1988, when I was Oregon sports editor for The Associated Press, I got a message from one of the bosses in New York.

Was anyone still around from the University of Oregon team, the “Tall Firs,” that won the first NCAA basketball championship in 1939?

“Heck,” I replied. “The coach is still alive.”

Howard “Hobby” Hobson was just 35 years old when he directed Oregon to that national title.

He’d come to Oregon in 1935 after four years at Southern Oregon Normal School.

I first met Hobby in 1973, when I was a senior at Oregon working on a story on the Tall Firs for a history of the school’s athletics for the student newspaper, the Daily Emerald. A soft-spoken, exceedingly kind man, he invited me to his Lake Oswego home to discuss those old days.

After I came to the AP in late 1975, I’d see Hobby often. He was a fixture at Portland Trail Blazers contests, sitting in the upper press section, still analyzing the game he loved.

That ‘39 team’s starting lineup was Oregon grown, and very tall for the era. The front line was

6-foot-6 John Dick, 6-6 Laddie Gale and 6-8 Urgel “Slim” Wintermute. Wally Johansen, 5-10, was one guard. The heart and soul of the team was 5-9 playmaker Bobby Anet. Johansen and Anet had played together since junior high.

The NCAA tournament was founded by the National Association of Basketball Coaches to compete with the prestigious National Invitation Tournament, which rarely invited West Coast teams.

Champions of eight regions squared off. Oregon beat California twice to advance to the regional tournament on Treasure

Island in San Francisco Bay, where it beat Texas 56-41 and Oklahoma 55-37.

“We had a heck of a travel disadvantage,” Dick told me back in ‘88. “We had to play Cal on a Thursday and Friday in Eugene; then we had to get on a train and go to San Francisco, play there Monday and Tuesday, then get on a train to Chicago and be ready to play on Monday.”

The title game against Ohio State was played in a rickety gym on the Northwestern campus.

“It was terrible,” Hobson recalled. “I don’t know why they had it there except Tug Wilson was prominent in organizing the thing and he was athletic director at Northwestern.”

“We beat Ohio State on a Big Ten floor with Big Ten officials in front of a Big Ten crowd.”

The court was elevated, so coaches had to crane their necks to see the action. Basketball’s inventor, James Naismith, was among the 5,500 people in the crowd.

“They said they had 5,500 people there,” Hobson

told me. “I think they gave half the tickets away.”

The first tournament lost \$2,600. Oregon beat Ohio State in convincing fashion, 46-33. Hobson went on to coach at Yale and wrote several basketball books. He died in 1991, a month shy of his 88th birthday.

Oregon’s triumph barely caused a ripple nationally, but it was a

very big deal back home.

“We expected the students, the people who were close to the program and the people who were interested in athletics to be excited about it,” Dick said in that interview 32 years ago. “But it seemed to touch across all parts of our society here in the state, from the governor on down.”

Bob Baum, who grew up in Union, covered 10 Olympics and four world track and field championships in a 43-year career with The Associated Press.

He retired last year after 23 years in Portland and 20 based in Phoenix, Arizona. He lives in Island City with his wife Leah and their four cats and two dogs



BOB BAUM
SPORTS COLUMNIST

Pandemic shakes up Olympic gymnastics qualification

LAUSANNE, Switzerland — The United States, Russia and China were each given an extra entry to the Olympic women’s gymnastics competition in Tokyo on Wednesday, Feb. 10, after the coronavirus pandemic forced a shake-up in qualifying.

The International Gymnastics Federation said it was canceling its all-around World Cup series of events because of the pandemic.

Those events were supposed to offer countries one extra spot for the Tokyo Games, helping the nations to compensate after Olympic teams were reduced in size from five athletes to four.

FIG is going back to 2019 world championship results to determine those places. That means the United States, Russia and China

get one extra women’s spot each, and Russia, China and Japan each receive an extra men’s spot. All of those countries already qualified a four-person team

for the men’s and women’s competitions.

Of the four planned all-around World Cup events, only one has taken place.

— *The Associated Press*

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