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BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

Over the last few weeks, life as we know it in this country has been flipped upside down due to the spreading of the coronavirus.

Lives have been lost, businesses have been shut down, schools are closed, weddings are canceled, public gatherings are forbidden, toilet paper is a novelty. I could go on and on.

While the loss of sports is minuscule in comparison to a lot of those things, it has still had an enormous impact on millions across the nation.

Mind of Matt

It's no secret that sports has a huge influence over our culture, and for many people — including myself, if I'm being honest — the moment when people realized that the coronavirus was much more serious than the common flu was when the NCAA Basketball Tournament was canceled.

Over the course of a 48-hour period, the entire sports world was shut down. Everything from the NBA to Little League was put on hold.

As an avid sports lover, I still haven't gotten over how surreal these last 21 days have been.

Sure, I'm incredibly disappointed that as we're entering a great season in the sports world — March Madness, NBA Playoffs, The Masters, MLB Opening Day — it all gets ripped away. But the gloominess of having no sports goes much deeper, at least for me.

I hurt for all the stadium workers and vendors who, in the blink of an eye, lost a paycheck that they desperately needed. I hurt for little leaguers who were excited to enter their first year of competitive baseball and don't understand why they are unable to play with their friends.

Above all, I hurt for the high school and college seniors who possibly played their last com-

petitive game without even knowing it. The athletes who didn't get to experience senior night or play the sport they have loved their whole lives in front of their family and friends one last time. The people that worked so hard all season for a goal and then had it ripped away from them without warning.

I experience the most empathy for these seniors because I know what they are going through.

I played football, basketball, baseball all through growing up and lettered in all three sports in my sophomore and junior years of high school. I had a goal of playing baseball in college, but I was thrilled by the possibility of one last hurrah in my senior

year of high school sports.

And then, unexpectedly, it got taken away.

At the end of my junior year, I was experiencing nasty daily headaches. But I continued to play and go about my life like everything was normal.

When the summer came, however, I just couldn't take it anymore.

The headaches got worse and worse every day. As time passed, I developed numerous other symptoms that continued to completely hamper my quality of life.

In a span of 365 days, I went from being a happy, healthy, three-sport athlete, to having a feeding tube inserted in my stomach, an ice-pack on my head at nearly all times and an inability to even walk from the car to a doctor's office.

I missed my senior year. I didn't get to graduate with all my friends. I was in excruciating pain every day and I couldn't see a light at the end of the tunnel.

Despite all the other issues I was having, I often thought about how I would never play competitive sports again. It tore me up that I would never again hear the shrieking cheer of my loving mother from the stands whenever I did something well, even if it moderately embarrassed me — like when I hit my only high school home run in a meaningless non-league game and tried to play it cool like this was a normal thing I did and she got so excited that her folding chair collapsed, but she kept on screaming in approval.

I thought about all the time and the hours I had put in and how it was all taken away by my body's betrayal.

Besides my Christian faith and my unbelievably supportive family, where I found some semblance of delight was watch-

ing Chip Kelly and the Oregon football team pull off the most successful two-year stretch in program history (2009-10).

I hung on every snap as the Ducks won back-to-back Pac-10 titles, made an appearance in the Rose Bowl and even made it to the National Title game. My father admitted to me years later that he used to pray that the Ducks would win because it was one of the only things that brought his son joy during this trial. Normally, praying for your favorite team to win would be absurd, but I think my pops deserves an exception.

Even if it was only on Saturday afternoons in the fall, for three brief hours, I was distracted from what was ailing me.

I wrote a column in January about sports being the great unifier. We have also seen numerous examples in the past of how sports can be a great healer as well.

After 9/11 when the New York Yankees returned to the ballfield two weeks after the worst terrorist attack to ever occur on U.S. soil, they were greeted with both tears and chants of "U-S-A" as they joined members of the NYPD and the FDNY on the field during the pregame ceremony.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans Saints returned to the Louisiana Superdome for the first time in over a year on Sept. 25, 2006 to take on the Atlanta Falcons on Monday Night Football. Steve Gleason blocked a punt that was recovered for a touchdown on the fourth play of the contest, a play that signaled the rebirth of a city that was in dire pain — there is even a statue outside the stadium to honor the legendary block.

There are numerous other

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OSAA not ready to give up on spring sports



LEFT: Luke Skipper is expected to be the top tennis player for the McNary boys program if there is a spring sports season. RIGHT: Kylie Dean hopes to be one of the top throwers in the league for the McNary girls track team.



File

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

The OSAA is still holding out hope for being able to establish some semblance of a spring sports season.

On Wednesday, March 18, the OSAA announced that it would extend the suspension of the spring sports season to April 28 after Oregon Governor Kate Brown announced the day prior that all schools would be closed due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

"It's unlike anything we have ever seen," said Peter Weber, who has been the executive director for the OSAA for

more than two decades. "We're just all trying to make the best decision possible and work with medical experts on what our next move should be."

The OSAA Executive Board will meet via conference call on April 1 and April 15 to discuss if the spring season should be canceled, or if competition will return in May.

However, many of their decisions might be predicated on what happens if the schools will re-open on the scheduled day.

"Because we are so tied to the schools, we wanted to align ourselves with them.

That's one of the reasons we haven't canceled yet," Weber said.

Last week, the OSAA staff discussed what the options were for each sport in the likely chance that teams would have to compete in a shortened season — if there is a season at all.

If the school year ends up getting extended to late-June, it could have an impact on if the OSAA decides to have a spring season.

"Certainly, we would take that into consideration," Weber said. "To be honest, we also talked about, if the kids are out of school for all this

period of time, and they come back, and the first thing they do is get out of school to go to these activities and sports, it's kind of in the back of our minds that there needs to be a balance there."

While the OSAA is still waiting to make a decision on whether or not there will be a spring sports season, they have already made the decision to cancel the speech and solo music state championships — speech was scheduled for April 23-25 and solo music was scheduled for May 2.

"We just ran into a lot of issues with the timing," Weber said.

The state championships for band, choir and orchestra have not been canceled, but the OSAA board will likely have a discussion about those events on April 1.

If there is a track and field season, the OSAA has elected not to hold the state meet at Hayward Field in Eugene. The 6A, 5A and 4A meets will be held at Mount Hood Community College on May 29-30, while 3A, 2A and 1A meets will be held on the same days at Western Oregon University.

The NCAA has canceled all intercollegiate spring sports for 2020 and many states across the country have done

the same for their high school sports. But Weber, and the rest of the OSAA staff, want to do their best to provide spring sports all across the state if possible.

It may be bleak for the time being, but Weber will be proceeding with cautious optimism.

"We still have a level of hope, but we are also realistic and we don't want to string people along," Weber said. "We know how important sports are for our kids and our community, so we're going to explore all options the best that we can."