

# Sports

## Winter sports season, set to start Dec. 28, not certain

■ Oregon School Activities Association executive board to meet Dec. 7

By Corey Kirk  
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After a hiatus of more than nine months, organized high school sports in Oregon are set to resume Dec. 28 with a season for traditional winter sports.

Or maybe not.

Earlier this fall the Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) set Dec. 28 as the date schools could start practices for basketball, wrestling and swimming.

The first interschool competitions were slated to start Jan. 11, 2021.

But the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) considers both basketball and wrestling “full-contact” sports, and with COVID-19 cases surging in most parts of the state, athletes in those sports can’t even have regular practices.

OSAA’s executive board is scheduled to meet Dec. 7 to decide how to proceed with the winter season.

“The fact that the student athletes can’t be basically in contact with each other, until that ban is lifted the effect will basically be that there’s no possibility to do those sports as they normally would be,” said Buell Gonzales Jr., athletic director for the Baker School District.

Pendleton Athletic Director Mike Somnis said he’s seeking one thing: clarity.

“I think clarity is what everyone is needing right now, it’s just the uncertainty we are all in,” Somnis said. “Are we going to play? How is this going to work? We have a plan in place on (Dec.) 28th, and starting games on (Jan.) 11th, but some of the restrictions in place will allow us to get to that point.”

Stanfield Athletic Director Daniel Sharp feels that the OSAA should be doing more.

“I don’t think they (OSAA) are doing a whole lot with anything, I think they are taking their marching orders from the health authorities and the governor’s office,” Sharp said. “I think people are ready to adjust and make it happen. It’s just kind of those regulations and the fear of schools hosting and being sued.”

Starting in September, OSAA allowed schools to have a series of three “mini-sessions.” Each month-long session allowed practices, and some unofficial interschool contests, starting with traditional spring sports, followed by fall sports and finally win-



Kathy Orr/Baker City Herald File Photo, 2019

Baker’s Gabe Gambleton drives past Pendleton’s Tanner Sweek in a December 2019 basketball game at Baker High School.

ter sports. The mini-session for winter sports started Nov. 17 and continues through Dec. 18, although practices are on hold during the two-week statewide “freeze” that continues through at least Dec. 2.

Darren Goodman, athletic director at La Grande High School, said the mini-sessions have been beneficial.

“It’s been good, we’ve been making sure we’ve been following safety procedures in practices,” Goodman said.

His feelings were echoed by Athena-Weston Athletic Director Shawn White.

“We’ve just been having practices with what’s allowable,” White said on Nov. 12.

Jason Crenshaw, athletic director at Joseph High School, said he and his colleagues have had to learn to adjust, and to not expect any schedule to happen without changes.

“It’s hard to plan your year, we (athletic directors) have to plan ahead and it’s really hard to anticipate what would happen with this pandemic,” Crenshaw said. “You have to plan like it’s not going to be there when you get to that point.”

White said he sympathizes with athletes who have been waiting so long to compete, and now might be deprived of a winter sports season.

“They just want to have a season, and they are obvi-

ously in the same boat as everybody else is,” White said. “We are just wondering what can they do.”

In the meantime, Goodman said he focuses on the activities that are allowed.

“We are going to do whatever it is that we can do; conditioning, skill work, things that you are allowed to do,” he said.

Gonzales said he is preparing to move ahead with a winter sports season if the OSAA executive board makes that decision during its Dec. 7 meeting.

“We will do everything we can within the guidelines,” he said. “It’s been super frustrating for our kids and families to have to go through this. The district, athletic department and the coaches have done a really good job of offering opportunities for the kids.”

Somnis intends to reassess the scenario at Pendleton High School as soon as the OSAA executive board has made a decision.

“Whatever comes out of that meeting, we will have to assess where we are at and where we are going to be, and what our ability to actually play not only season two and into season three and season four,” Somnis said. “We will be very proactive making sure the kids have an outlet in some form or other.”

## PRACTICES

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Goodman said he doesn’t intend to set up an online conditioning program, based on the idea that the freeze will end Dec. 2 and schools can resume practices during the mini-session.

“If the weather is decent we can do some conditioning outside but we aren’t going to do online conditioning for the sports,” Goodman said.

At Baker High School, meanwhile, coaches will be meeting online with athletes during the freeze.

“We moved to a virtual format where the coaches will connect with kids individually and provide direction and provide an opportunity to connect,” Gonzales said. “That is going to continue as long as we are in this freeze.”

In Pendleton, Somnis said indoor sports, such as basketball, will transition to outdoor training with the hope that a regular winter sports season will start Dec. 28. He said other sports might also have outdoor workouts.

The Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) executive board is slated to meet Dec. 7 to decide whether to move ahead with that plan.

“If any coaches want to do anything outside under the certain guidelines for outside conditioning they can, I know our tennis program intends to meet to have the kids do a little running,” Somnis said. “I think boys basketball may look into using the track to get a little conditioning in.”

He said the unexpected interruption in practices was particularly disappointing because Pendleton athletes had been taking advantage of the opportunities during the mini-sessions throughout the fall.

“The last ten weeks have been great, our weight training classes, our dance teams and our volleyball team have been able to use the gym for workouts, conditioning and practices and we haven’t had a single issue,” Somnis said.

Though the two-week freeze is a setback, Goodman is steadfast in pursuing the main objective — maintaining responsibility, getting back to playing sports and above all keeping everyone safe.

“We all want sports back, we all want the athletes to have those experiences, but we also have to be responsible and if the numbers are high right now then let’s protect our kids,” Goodman said.

## Blazers draft WSU’s Elleby

By Anne M. Peterson  
AP Sports Writer

Portland has a new CJ.

The Trail Blazers selected forward CJ Elleby out of Washington State with the 46th pick in the NBA draft Wednesday night.

Elleby, the first Cougar drafted since Klay Thompson in 2011, averaged 18.4 points and 7.8 rebounds as a sophomore last season.

A 6-foot-6 lefty known as a disruptive defender, Elleby matched his career high with 30 points in his final game with Washington State, an 82-68 victory over Colorado in the opening round of the Pac-12 tournament. He added 10 assists.

His 30 points were the most for a Cougar in the conference tournament since Thompson had 43 points in a game in 2011.

In his two seasons with the Cougars, Elleby averaged 16.6 points and 7.5 rebounds a game. He becomes Portland’s second CJ, joining guard CJ McCollum.

Earlier in the draft, the Blazers selected Isaiah Stewart out of Washington with the 16th pick, but the 6-foot-9, 250-pound forward won’t be heading to Portland.

The Trail Blazers reportedly traded the pick to Houston along with forward Trevor Ariza on Monday for veteran Robert Covington, according to a report by ESPN. The deal could not be formally announced by the Blazers until after the draft.

### PAC-12 FOOTBALL

## Pac-12 will allow nonconference games

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The Pac-12 Conference has approved a plan to allow member schools to schedule nonconference football opponents subject to certain conditions if games are canceled.

The conference has had five of its 18 scheduled games during the first three weeks canceled amid COVID-19 issues. California and UCLA were able to schedule a game against each other last weekend on 45 hours’ notice after Cal’s game against Arizona State and

UCLA’s matchup against Utah were canceled due to the Sun Devils and Utes having several positive COVID-19 tests.

Colorado was slated to host Arizona State on Saturday but that game was called off earlier this week.

The conference’s new scheduling plan could give the Buffaloes the possibility of facing Colorado State or Wyoming if the Mountain West Conference doesn’t schedule a rematch between the two schools.

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