

Masks may be back for indoor fall sports

By ANNIE FOWLER
STAFF WRITER

PENDLETON — Put your mask on.

That is the word from the Oregon School Activities Association for indoor sports this fall.

The announcement came shortly after Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced on Thursday, July 29, that staff and students at K-12 schools will have to wear masks at school this fall.

The OSAA did say it is waiting for more information from the Oregon Health Authority, so nothing is set in stone.

The mandate relates to just volleyball in the fall, as football and cross-country are held outdoors.

“Nothing is certain yet,” Pendleton Athletic Director Mike Somnis said. “I know the governor put something out, and I’m sure it will happen sometime, but we have not gotten the directive yet.”

In Umatilla and Morrow counties, the number of COVID-19 cases has increased dramatically in the last half of July. The two counties had the highest number of positive COVID-19 tests in the state from July 11-22.

Longtime Riverside Athletic Director Clair Costello said whatever the Oregon School Activities Association and the Oregon Health Authority decide, they have to comply.

“I have no say,” Costello said. “It’s just whatever they say, we have to do. If the administration says we wear them, we wear them. It’s hard on the kids when they have to run, especially if they are asthmatic.”

Somnis agreed.

“I don’t think anyone wants to put these things back on when it comes to competition,” said Somnis, who noted that statewide ath-



Hermiston’s Cayleigh Miller (11) leaps to tip the ball over the net during the third set against the Bucks March 11, 2021, at Hermiston High School. Student athletes in the fall could have to again wear masks due to the increasing rate of COVID-19 spread.

Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

letic director meetings are set for next week and may offer some clarity.

While there has been mention of athletes wearing masks, neither athletic director has heard anything where fans are concerned.

“With all the new COVID outbreaks, I don’t know what we will do with fans,” Costello said. “Outside we will be OK. We are waiting on Morrow County to see

what we have to do. There is no arguing, you just do what they tell you to do.”

The rules also may change athletic schedules, which were a jumble this past spring.

“In soccer and basketball, we have overnight trips, which we couldn’t have last season,” Costello said. “We already lost a football game in Week 3. We will have to see what happens there.”

For Hermiston, which plays in the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association, the mandate would be for home games only, as the WIAA has not issued any restrictions for fall sports.

The Bulldogs’ eight Mid-Columbia Conference partners — Chiawana, Hanford, Kamiakin, Kennewick, Pasco, Richland, Southridge and Walla Walla — are all in Washington.

DEQ issues air quality warning

HERMISTON HERALD

Hermiston on the morning of Monday, Aug. 2, had the second worst air quality in Oregon.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality issued an air quality warning for Umatilla County, Morrow County and the rest of Northeastern Oregon due to smoke from wildfires in Washington, Idaho and Canada, according to a Monday, Aug. 2, press release.

DEQ anticipated keeping the warning in place until the evening of Aug. 5, but advised residents to check the state’s Air Quality Index because conditions can change rapidly depending on the weather.

As of 11 a.m. Aug. 2, Northeastern Oregon had some of the worst air quality numbers in the state.

According to DEQ, Oakridge, which was directly affected by the Middle Fork Complex fire in eastern Lane County, had the worst air quality statewide as of 11 a.m. Aug. 2. And Hermiston was No. 2. Pendleton’s air quality score was much lower, but still at a “moderate” level.

Poor air quality can irritate people’s eyes and lungs and can especially affect younger children, older adults, pregnant women and people with health conditions. DEQ is advising residents to stay at home, avoid strenuous outdoor activities and to use air filters and air purifiers when possible.

Cloth and surgical masks won’t protect residents from smoke particles, and while N95 masks or respirators could provide a safeguard against the smoke, they must be properly fitted and worn.

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