



NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2020

[Football's second-season begins in earnest](#)

At Noon central time on Tuesday, all ticket links will be published to the TSSAAsports.com Playoff Headquarters page for the general public to purchase any remaining tickets.

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[Long-time Manchester official honored for Distinguished Service](#)

Major Shelton has dedicated nearly 50 years to officiating basketball and baseball in Tennessee.

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[Girls' state soccer tournament delayed until Friday](#)

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[High School Sports Postseason Competition Returns Across Country](#)

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[Unified Sports: More Than Just a One-Day Event](#)

Unified Sports continue to change the landscape of high school athletics and create an environment that promotes equity and leadership while breaking traditional stereotypes.

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[Pandemic Intensifies Need to Retain, Recruit Officials for High School Sports](#)

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Call for Submissions

We want to include your thoughts in the monthly TSSAA Newsletter! Do you have 50-500 words to share on the topic of **school administrators as role models**? We welcome submissions from principals, athletic administrators, coaches and students! Consider sharing your thoughts, essays or even poems for an upcoming issue. Please send submissions in Microsoft Word format to mgillespie@tssaa.org.

TSSAA continues its support of the **National SAT/ACT Prep Project** through the NFHS and eKnowledge which allows any Tennessee student to receive a 95% discount on SAT or ACT prep courses. This is a community-service, non-profit project and all student fees are reinvested to improve the program and reach more families. The project has more than 45,000 five-star reviews and has already assisted nearly 300,000 families. Learn more at <https://eknowledge.com/TSSAA>.



Sports News

General News

Football's "second season" begins in earnest

2020 BlueCross Bowl scheduled for Dec. 3-5 in Cookeville

October 31, 2020

With a few exceptions, the brackets for the 52nd TSSAA high school football playoffs have been set.

Teams in the third quadrant of Division I Class 5A await the outcome of a special called Board of Control meeting on Monday, Nov. 2 which will determine pairings for the Region 5 and 6 teams.

Several Division II Class AAA teams will play a final regular season game on Nov. 6 which will delay the formulation of brackets for that class until the conclusion of those games. The delay in setting the DII-AAA brackets does not affect their postseason schedule, as the playoffs for DII-AAA do not begin until Nov. 13.

At Noon central time on Tuesday, all ticket links will be published to the [TSSAAsports.com Playoff Headquarters](https://www.tssaa.com/Playoff-Headquarters) page for the general public to purchase any remaining tickets.

[Playoff Headquarters](#)

[Purchase Tickets](#)

Ticket sales will be limited to the number of spectators the host school has informed TSSAA they are able to accommodate with COVID-19 distancing measures in place. Schools moving home playoff games to alternate venues should notify a TSSAA staff member immediately information can be updated.

Schools are continuing to follow the COVID-19 guidelines and mandates and TSSAA believes that every adult and every participant must do their part and follow the guidelines set forth by the association and conduct themselves safely and thoughtfully so that the schools can provide as many opportunities as possible for the student-athletes this fall.

School administrators and coaches are aware of the guidelines and requirements, but the general public can educate themselves on what is being asked of everyone attending and participating in high school games this season by visiting the [Return to Play page at TSSAA.org](https://www.tssaa.org/Return-to-Play).

Spectators should be prepared to wear masks and have their temperatures checked at the entry gates. Those that are or have recently experienced COVID-19 symptoms will be asked to not enter the stadium.

Playoff Notes

- The Webb School (Bell Buckle, DII-A) is making its first TSSAA playoff appearance. The school began playing 11-man football last year.

- Cosby (Class 2A) is making its first playoff appearance in nine years. The Eagles are also seeking their first postseason win in nine tries.
- Grundy Co. (Class 3A) is back in the playoffs for the first time since 2014. A playoff victory has eluded the Yellowjackets since their 16-15 first-round victory over Trousdale Co. in 2003.
- Harpeth (Class 3A) returns to the playoff field for the first time since 2016. The last postseason win for the program came in 2011 in the first round against Sequatchie County, 28-14.
- Loretto and Cascade end five-year postseason droughts with their first-round games in the Class 2A playoffs. Loretto is 9-15 in 16 TSSAA playoff appearances. Cascade is 8-14 in 15 appearances.
- For the first time since 2016 and tenth time in school history, Warren Co. qualifies for the football playoffs in the state's highest classification. The Pioneers travel to Mt. Juliet in the first round. Warren Co. is 3-9 in the playoffs since their first appearance in 1973.
- East Hickman (Class 2A) makes its third playoff appearance overall and first since 2003. The school opened in 2007. The Eagles won their first-ever playoff game 18-14 in a 2012 first-round meeting with South Gibson.
- Cloudland and Midway will face off for the ninth time in the TSSAA playoffs. Midway won the first meeting in 1988, 40-7, and then again in 2013, 26-14.
- Oneida and Hampton have met seven previous times in the playoffs. The first meeting was a 24-6 Oneida victory in 1982.
- Oak Ridge and Soddy-Daisy meet in the playoffs for the fourth consecutive season. The last two meetings have ended with the same exact score, 40-23 in favor of Oak Ridge. Soddy-Daisy has never defeated Oak Ridge in the playoffs.
- Thirty games in the first week of this year's playoff games are rematches of playoff games in 2019.

Playoff Pairings

Class 1A

Game 101: [Reg. 1 #1] Cloudland (6-4) vs. [Reg. 2 #4] Midway (6-4)

Game 102: [Reg. 2 #2] Oliver Springs (5-5) vs. [Reg. 1 #3] Jellico (4-6)

Game 103: [Reg. 2 #3] Greenback (4-4) vs. [Reg. 1 #2] Unaka (3-4)

Game 104: [Reg. 1 #4] Hancock Co. (0-8) vs. [Reg. 2 #1] Coalfield (9-0)

Game 105: [Reg. 3 #1] South Pittsburg (9-1) vs. [Reg. 4 #4] Jo Byrns (4-6)

Game 106: [Reg. 4 #2] Monterey (7-2) vs. [Reg. 3 #3] Sale Creek (4-6)

Game 107: [Reg. 4 #3] Clay Co. (6-4) vs. [Reg. 3 #2] Copper Basin (8-1)

Game 108: [Reg. 3 #4] Whitwell (1-7) vs. [Reg. 4 #1] Gordonsville (7-2)

Game 109: [Reg. 5 #1] Fayetteville (8-2) vs. [Reg. 6 #4] Hollow Rock-Bruceton (5-4)

Game 110: [Reg. 6 #2] Collinwood (6-3) vs. [Reg. 5 #3] Huntland (6-4)

Game 111: [Reg. 6 #3] Wayne Co. (5-5) vs. [Reg. 5 #2] Moore Co. (9-1)

Game 112: [Reg. 5 #4] Cornersville (7-3) vs. [Reg. 6 #1] Huntingdon (8-2)

Game 113: [Reg. 7 #1] Greenfield (8-1) vs. [Reg. 8 #4] BYE

Game 114: [Reg. 8 #2] BYE vs. [Reg. 7 #3] West Carroll (6-3)

Game 115: [Reg. 8 #3] BYE vs. [Reg. 7 #2] Lake Co. (5-1)

Game 116: [Reg. 7 #4] Dresden (4-4) vs. [Reg. 8 #1] BYE

Class 2A

Game 101: [Reg. 1 #1] South Greene (10-0) vs. [Reg. 2 #4] Cumberland Gap (4-6)

Game 102: [Reg. 2 #2] Rockwood (7-3) vs. [Reg. 1 #3] Happy Valley (5-3)

Game 103: [Reg. 2 #3] Oneida (4-4) vs. [Reg. 1 #2] Hampton (8-1)

Game 104: [Reg. 1 #4] Cosby (2-8) vs. [Reg. 2 #1] Meigs Co. (10-0)

Game 105: [Reg. 3 #1] Bledsoe Co. (10-0) vs. [Reg. 4 #4] Cascade (5-5)

Game 106: [Reg. 4 #2] Trousdale Co. (8-2) vs. [Reg. 3 #3] Tyner (4-4)

Game 107: [Reg. 4 #3] Westmoreland (5-5) vs. [Reg. 3 #2] Marion Co. (6-2)

Game 108: [Reg. 3 #4] Tellico Plains (4-6) vs. [Reg. 4 #1] Watertown (9-1)

Game 109: [Reg. 5 #1] Lewis Co. (10-0) vs. [Reg. 6 #4] Scotts Hill (4-6)

Game 110: [Reg. 6 #2] Riverside (7-3) vs. [Reg. 5 #3] Eagleville (5-5)

Game 111: [Reg. 6 #3] East Hickman (7-2) vs. [Reg. 5 #2] Forrest (6-4)

Game 112: [Reg. 5 #4] Loretto (5-5) vs. [Reg. 6 #1] Waverly (7-2)

Game 113: [Reg. 7 #1] Peabody (10-0) vs. [Reg. 8 #4] BYE

Game 114: [Reg. 8 #2] BYE vs. [Reg. 7 #3] Union City (6-4)

Game 115: [Reg. 8 #3] BYE vs. [Reg. 7 #2] McKenzie (7-3)

Game 116: [Reg. 7 #4] Adamsville (6-4) vs. [Reg. 8 #1] BYE

Class 3A

Game 101: [Reg. 1 #1] Claiborne (9-1) vs. [Reg. 2 #4] Pigeon Forge (6-3)
Game 102: [Reg. 2 #2] Gatlinburg-Pittman (8-2) vs. [Reg. 1 #3] Unicoi Co. (5-4)
Game 103: [Reg. 2 #3] Kingston (6-3) vs. [Reg. 1 #2] Chuckey-Doak (6-3)
Game 104: [Reg. 1 #4] Johnson Co. (5-5) vs. [Reg. 2 #1] Alcoa (9-1)

Game 105: [Reg. 3 #1] Red Bank (7-0) vs. [Reg. 4 #4] Grundy Co. (2-7)
Game 106: [Reg. 4 #2] Smith Co. (4-6) vs. [Reg. 3 #3] Brainerd (6-4)
Game 107: [Reg. 4 #3] York Institute (3-7) vs. [Reg. 3 #2] Loudon (8-1)
Game 108: [Reg. 3 #4] Signal Mountain (4-4) vs. [Reg. 4 #1] Upperman (7-3)

Game 109: [Reg. 5 #1] Pearl Cohn (6-0) vs. [Reg. 6 #4] Camden (2-8)
Game 110: [Reg. 6 #2] Fairview (7-2) vs. [Reg. 5 #3] East Nashville (2-2)
Game 111: [Reg. 6 #3] Harpeth (3-6) vs. [Reg. 5 #2] Giles Co. (3-7)
Game 112: [Reg. 5 #4] Stratford (2-4) vs. [Reg. 6 #1] Stewart Co. (8-1)

Game 113: [Reg. 7 #1] Milan (9-1) vs. [Reg. 8 #4] BYE
Game 114: [Reg. 8 #2] BYE vs. [Reg. 7 #3] Covington (8-2)
Game 115: [Reg. 8 #3] BYE vs. [Reg. 7 #2] South Gibson (7-2)
Game 116: [Reg. 7 #4] Westview (6-4) vs. [Reg. 8 #1] BYE

Class 4A

Game 101: [Reg. 1 #1] Elizabethton (10-0) vs. [Reg. 2 #4] East Ridge (6-4)
Game 102: [Reg. 2 #2] East Hamilton (7-3) vs. [Reg. 1 #3] Sullivan South (8-2)
Game 103: [Reg. 2 #3] Howard (6-3) vs. [Reg. 1 #2] Greeneville (7-3)
Game 104: [Reg. 1 #4] Grainger (6-4) vs. [Reg. 2 #1] Anderson Co. (8-2)

Game 105: [Reg. 3 #1] DeKalb Co. (6-3) vs. [Reg. 4 #4] Spring Hill (3-5)
Game 106: [Reg. 4 #2] Nolensville (5-3) vs. [Reg. 3 #3] Livingston Academy (6-4)
Game 107: [Reg. 4 #3] Marshall Co. (7-2) vs. [Reg. 3 #2] Macon Co. (7-2)
Game 108: [Reg. 3 #4] Stone Memorial (4-6) vs. [Reg. 4 #1] Tullahoma (10-0)

Game 109: [Reg. 5 #1] Springfield (9-1) vs. [Reg. 6 #4] Jackson South Side (2-6)
Game 110: [Reg. 6 #2] Hardin Co. (8-2) vs. [Reg. 5 #3] White House Heritage (7-3)
Game 111: [Reg. 6 #3] Jackson North Side (6-2) vs. [Reg. 5 #2] Creek Wood (9-1)
Game 112: [Reg. 5 #4] White House (4-6) vs. [Reg. 6 #1] Lexington (9-1)

Game 113: [Reg. 7 #1] Haywood (7-3) vs. [Reg. 8 #4] BYE
Game 114: [Reg. 8 #2] Millington (3-7) vs. [Reg. 7 #3] Dyersburg (5-2)
Game 115: [Reg. 8 #3] BYE vs. [Reg. 7 #2] Ripley (6-4)
Game 116: [Reg. 7 #4] Crockett Co. (4-4) vs. [Reg. 8 #1] Fayette Ware (7-2)

Class 5A

Game 101: [Reg. 1 #1] David Crockett (8-2) vs. [Reg. 2 #4] Sevier Co. (5-5)
Game 102: [Reg. 2 #2] South-Doyle (7-3) vs. [Reg. 1 #3] Daniel Boone (5-4)
Game 103: [Reg. 2 #3] Knoxville Halls (7-1) vs. [Reg. 1 #2] Tennessee High (5-3)
Game 104: [Reg. 1 #4] Morristown East (5-4) vs. [Reg. 2 #1] Knoxville Central (8-2)

Game 105: [Reg. 3 #1] Knoxville West (9-1) vs. [Reg. 4 #4] Lenoir City (2-8)
Game 106: [Reg. 4 #2] Walker Valley (7-2) vs. [Reg. 3 #3] Powell (8-2)
Game 107: [Reg. 4 #3] Soddy-Daisy (3-7) vs. [Reg. 3 #2] Oak Ridge (7-3)
Game 108: [Reg. 3 #4] Knoxville Fulton (4-4) vs. [Reg. 4 #1] Rhea Co. (9-1)

Game 109: TBD
Game 110: TBD
Game 111: TBD
Game 112: TBD

Game 113: [Reg. 7 #1] Henry Co. (8-2) vs. [Reg. 8 #4] BYE

Game 114: [Reg. 8 #2] Brighton (5-5) vs. [Reg. 7 #3] Dyer Co. (7-2)
Game 115: [Reg. 8 #3] BYE vs. [Reg. 7 #2] Clarksville Northeast (6-2)
Game 116: [Reg. 7 #4] Clarksville (4-4) vs. [Reg. 8 #1] Munford (7-3)

Class 6A

Game 101: [Reg. 1 #1] Dobyms Bennett (8-2) vs. [Reg. 2 #4] Cleveland (5-5)
Game 102: [Reg. 2 #2] McMinn Co. (9-1) vs. [Reg. 1 #3] Bearden (4-5)
Game 103: [Reg. 2 #3] Bradley Central (7-3) vs. [Reg. 1 #2] Farragut (7-3)
Game 104: [Reg. 1 #4] Science Hill (7-3) vs. [Reg. 2 #1] Maryville (10-0)

Game 105: [Reg. 3 #1] Oakland (10-0) vs. [Reg. 4 #4] Rossvie (5-3)
Game 106: [Reg. 4 #2] Mt. Juliet (6-3) vs. [Reg. 3 #3] Warren Co. (8-2)
Game 107: [Reg. 4 #3] Wilson Central (6-4) vs. [Reg. 3 #2] Riverdale (8-2)
Game 108: [Reg. 3 #4] Blackman (4-5) vs. [Reg. 4 #1] Hendersonville (7-3)

Game 109: [Reg. 5 #1] Smyrna (7-3) vs. [Reg. 6 #4] Franklin (5-5)
Game 110: [Reg. 6 #2] Ravenwood (6-4) vs. [Reg. 5 #3] Stewart's Creek (5-4)
Game 111: [Reg. 6 #3] Independence (6-2) vs. [Reg. 5 #2] LaVergne (5-5)
Game 112: [Reg. 5 #4] Cane Ridge (3-3) vs. [Reg. 6 #1] Brentwood (7-3)

Game 113: [Reg. 7 #1] Bartlett (6-1) vs. [Reg. 8 #4] BYE
Game 114: [Reg. 8 #2] BYE vs. [Reg. 7 #3] Houston (5-5)
Game 115: [Reg. 8 #3] BYE vs. [Reg. 7 #2] Collierville (4-3)
Game 116: [Reg. 7 #4] Arlington (5-4) vs. [Reg. 8 #1] BYE

Division II-A

DCA vs. BYE
Trinity Christian vs. Franklin Grace
MTCS vs. Columbia Academy
USJ vs. BYE
Davidson Academy vs. BYE
Friendship Christian vs. Jackson Christian
Nashville Christian vs. Webb School

Division II-AA

ECS vs. FRA
BGA vs. Northpoint Christian
Lipscomb Academy vs. St. George's
Lausanne vs. Harding Academy
CAK vs. Boyd Buchanan
Goodpasture vs. Knoxville Webb
CPA vs. Silverdale
Knoxville Grace vs. Chattanooga Christian

Division II-AAA

TBD



Distinguished Service

General News

Officiating News

Long-time Manchester official honored for Distinguished Service

October 16, 2020

The offering of a prayer muted the whistle.

Major Shelton had just made a key decision while officiating a high school game in Chattanooga when the late, great TSSAA Hall of Fame coach Henry Bowles informed Shelton of his intent to lift up Shelton.

“Coach Bowles looked at me when I ran by him,” Shelton said, “ and he said, 'Major, I'm going to go to church tomorrow and pray for you.'”

“You can't tee up a guy who's said he was going to pray for you.”

Shelton's contributions and memories from officiating Tennessee high school sports, primarily basketball and baseball, touch five different decades and nearly total a full 50 years; he's the October recipient of the TSSAA's Distinguished Service Award.

“The kids, the people, the referees, it's just as I said, referees are like a bunch of brothers and sisters,” Shelton explained. “We pick and aggravate each other. One good friend of mine from officiating, we talk on the phone two or three times a week, and during basketball season, four or five times a week. A good friend of mine from Lawrenceburg, Mickey Dunn, he and I talked every week or two during the time he was on chemo, and he was just a real nice guy. He stands out to me as one of the fine coaches I dealt with over the years.”

Shelton is hesitant to recall too many coaches by name. Quite frankly, there are too many for Shelton to list. It's byproduct of what he estimates as between 2,500 and 3,000 officiating assignments, from standard prep girls' and boys' games; tournament quadruple-headers and plenty of collegiate basketball assignments along the way, including NCAA Division I work in the Ohio Valley Conference.

He's done it all with his wife, Debbie, by his side the past 48 years while they also were raising three sons. Too, Shelton helped operate his dairy farm for nearly two decades when he wasn't amassing between 250,000-300,000 miles and “wearing out two or three cars” calling games.

“I was a dairy farmer for 20 years,” said Shelton, who has worked TSSAA State Championships in both basketball and baseball. “I was milking around 125 cows, and we ran 400 to 500 Holstein heifers at the time. Seven days a week, 365, 366 days a year.”

Shelton's lifetime of friendships with TSSAA legends Burrell Crowell, Ray Moffett and Gabby Street transcend the cramped gyms and worn whistles.



Major Shelton

Yet the former Coffee County basketball and football player Shelton hasn't just impacted youth in an official's uniform; he's also a retired Coffee County High School educator including stints in administration and as athletic director.

Shelton's memories from his time directing the county's alternative school spark memories equally vivid to him recalling the night in Chattanooga when former high school All-Americans C.J. Black of Brainerd and Vincent Yarbrough of Cleveland squared off. Black dunked so hard he broke the backboard and the game was continued 24 hours later.

"You take a kid that maybe nobody has shown interest in and show interest in them and push them, you'll be surprised what you get out of them," Shelton, an MTSU graduate, said of his time as principal at the alternative school. "I had good people helping me out, and we had a four-year period where if we got them early enough, we got 100% of them graduated.

"It makes you feel good to see a kid walk the (graduation) line, get done with the ceremony and then come back to see you. We had a kid, he wanted to go into the service, into the U.S. Marines, and he was almost 18 when we got him. I worked with him daily. He finally graduated, goes into the Marines and his first stop after boot camp, he came straight to school in his full dress uniform."

TSSAA proudly salutes Major Shelton for his decades of service to the schools and student-athletes in Tennessee as a contest official.

AUTHOR

John Brice



Sports News

Championships News

Girls' state soccer tournament delayed until Friday

Tropical Storm Zeta's projected arrival forces two day delay

October 26, 2020

Due to the projected rainfall from Tropical Storm Zeta expected to hit the Murfreesboro area on Wednesday and Thursday and the resulting likelihood of unplayable conditions at the Richard Siegel Soccer Complex, the decision has been made to postpone the 2020 Girls' Soccer State Championships by two days. **The tournament will now be held Friday, October 30th through Monday, November 2nd** at the Richard Siegel Soccer Complex.

Division I will play quarterfinals on Friday, October 30, semifinals on Saturday, October 31, and championship games on Monday, November 2. Division II will play semifinals on Saturday, October 31 and finals on Sunday, November 1. Game times will remain as originally scheduled. Keep in mind that the field numbers published for each match are subject to change.

Per the COVID-19 guidelines, ticket sales will be restricted to 1/3 capacity, which amounts to 200 tickets sold per match for all quarterfinal and semifinal games. Championship matches will be restricted to 667 tickets per game. ***Tickets for the first rounds of the state tournament will now go on sale at noon CT on Tuesday, October 27 at gofan.co/TSSAA.***

We regret any inconvenience this causes for the student-athletes, schools, parents, and fans and appreciate your understanding as we work through this unavoidable situation to provide the best field conditions for this championship.

High School Sports Postseason Competition Returns Across Country

By Dr. Karissa Niehoff on October 28, 2020

[*nfhs news*](#)

“Going to State” is the mantra of high school sports teams as their seasons begin. While the opportunity to simply participate is the biggest thrill, playing in a state championship contest is a close second.

In a normal year, the chance to play in a state championship is usually dependent upon the team’s success during the regular season. Unfortunately, in the COVID-19 world, “opportunity” has had more to do with the Coronavirus than a team’s prowess.

Fortunately, that opportunity finally returned this month on a large-scale basis for the first time since March, when 34 of the 51 NFHS member associations were unable to complete their state basketball tournaments, followed by the cancellation of spring sports in all states.

Although Iowa was the first state to return to play after the March shutdown with summer baseball and softball seasons and state tournaments in late July and early August, the excitement of postseason competition resumed in many other states earlier this month.

Among the state tournaments that have been completed this fall are boys soccer in North Dakota, South Dakota and Idaho; girls soccer in South Dakota, Utah and Idaho; girls volleyball in Mississippi, Oklahoma and Tennessee; and cross country in Alaska, Colorado, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Utah. In some of these events, there were more precautions than in a normal year, but the chance for a state title was back!

Later this week, girls volleyball tournaments will conclude in Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kansas, New Hampshire and Utah, and 19 others are set to finish in November.

The NFHS Football Completion Chart shows that 30 of the 35 states that were able to continue with football this fall amid the pandemic will conduct state championships, with the other five states ending postseason play at the regional or sectional levels. While some of the states reduced the number of regular-season games, and some teams or individuals may have been ineligible due to quarantines, the overall perseverance of student-athletes, coaches and parents has been amazing.

Most of the state football championships will be held in November and December, with North Dakota crowning the first champion on November 13 and Texas the last January 14-16. The Texas University Interscholastic League had to push its large-school championship to January after a late start to the season.

The remaining states have plans to start football and other traditional fall sports during the winter or spring months and, at this point, all are hoping to stage state championships on dates yet to be determined.

While some student-athletes in traditional fall sports will have to wait a bit longer for their opportunity, we are pleased that, slowly but surely, the highlights of actual high school sports competition – and state championships – will be making headlines rather than the latest list of cancellations due to the Coronavirus.

Many of the state associations that will be staging football championships in the coming weeks will be faced with limitations on the number of spectators. While we hope fans will be permitted, the NFHS Network (www.NFHSNetwork.com) is a great alternative in most states as parents and other fans will still be able to watch the events live on the Internet.

Unfortunately, the outlook is not as bright for our 51 member state associations. Since these associations are heavily dependent on revenue from state tournaments, those that were unable to host state basketball tournaments and all spring sports events, and now with the potential of loss of gate receipts from fall championships, are facing severe financial challenges.

Working day and night with governors, state departments of education and public health, and local school districts, these leaders of our state associations have done a phenomenal job of balancing the need for these vital programs against the safety concerns related to the Coronavirus. Their No. 1 goal has been keeping programs alive so that students continue to have the opportunity to participate.

Now, it is time for leaders in communities throughout our nation to support and assist these 51 associations to ensure they have the means to continue operations – and continue to provide these once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for high school students.

[Read all NFHS Voice columns here.](#)

Unified Sports: More Than Just a One-Day Event

By Dr. Steve Amaro, CMAA on October 28, 2020

[hst](#)

When the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) published the Dear Colleague Letter on January 25, 2013, it detailed the importance of creating athletic opportunities for students with disabilities. It was this mandate that caused Unified and Adapted Sports programs to grow in popularity throughout the nation.

Schools have taken different approaches to meet the recommendations put forward in the Dear Colleague letter ranging from inclusive exhibition contests occurring during pregames or halftimes of varsity games, to hosting Unified contests during the school day to increase student awareness and support for all student-athletes.

Testimonials show these events are important in creating more compassionate and inclusive environments while breaking pre-existing stereotypes, but Unified can be much more than just one day in a school year or season. In fact, when we push the limits of what we can do with Unified programs, we fulfill the OCR letter to “expand” our programs so that all stakeholders get the opportunity to benefit from meaningful co-curricular participation.

To expand Unified opportunities, schools can broaden their vision by exploring beyond a one-day event and examine how all the facets of a campus can promote inclusion such as creating Unified Athletic Leagues, establishing Unified theatre and piloting curricular crossover programs.

Establishing Unified Athletic League Schedules

It is no secret that single-day Unified contests with rival schools can be meaningful experiences. For example, two schools may schedule a Unified Basketball contest to take place before the varsity game. Schools throughout the nation praise how these games have changed not only the culture of a team, but entire communities as they allow participants and spectators to see genuine teamwork focused on a meaningful participation for all.

With further creativity, schools can explore sustaining these events through a league season. Most varsity athletic programs schedule home and away contests with schools in their leagues. Duplicating such a schedule for Unified programs does present challenges for many schools; however, playing half the league schedule, and balancing home and away contests over a two-year period, allows Unified participants to not only shine on their one day against the school rival, but also to experience the fullness of being a teammate through an entire season of sport.

When students are given more time to work together, and they experience the excitement of playing home and away games over a season, they learn more from each other. Consequently, they become

better teammates, which builds confidence and stronger friendships that can transcend an athletic game or season.

When designing league schedules, it is important to realize that adult leaders can and should exercise flexibility. For instance, leagues that choose to run Unified Basketball games may want to consider having a running clock, shorten practice times, limit the number of contests a team can play, and schedule games on alternate days of varsity games.

If athletic leaders adopt the goal of creating Unified programs that provide meaningful athletic experiences, schools can adjust traditional norms of how they view participation so that Unified teams become a part of the athletic department and experience all the best benefits of league competition.

Furthermore, schools may even want to explore adding a Unified sport for each season of athletic competition. In this way, all students, including those with disabilities, have an opportunity to participate in athletics throughout an entire school year.

Think Outside Athletics...the Unified Play

As Unified Sports have grown in popularity, it is not surprising that other cocurricular activities have recognized a new opportunity for inclusion. Unified Theatre, creating opportunities for students to work together in the performing arts, has become a new way for general education students to partner with those with disabilities.

Most prominent of resources available for Unified Theatre may be the Special Olympics Play, "It's Our School, Too." Production runs of this play not only provide a positive message to the participants; they have been praised by entire communities as revealing the power and vision of a more inclusive world. Local Special Olympics chapters have more information on this outstanding play and are a great resource when exploring how to bring it to school communities.

Curricular Crossover – Athletes and Special Needs Students Bridging Athletics and Academics

One of the pillars of being part of any high school athletics team is finding meaningful ways for athletes to exercise citizenship and serve the community. Most athletic teams explore how to conduct service learning outside the school campus, such as community clean-up events or donation drives for specific service organizations. Unified programs have a unique opportunity to put general education and special needs team members in positions to transform their schools inside their campus walls through curricular crossover.

Although it is the goal of many schools to achieve full inclusion in all academic classes, few models exist. Curricular Crossover students, regardless of academic challenges, are brought together in all types of class settings. General education students invite their special needs teammates to attend one general education academic period during a predetermined window of days during or after

their season of sport. General education teammates are given the roll of organizer as they not only talk to their special needs teammates to determine their teammates academic subject interest, but they also work with the academic teacher to determine how best to make a welcoming and meaningful experience.

For example, the general education teammate may learn that his/her teammate is most interested in science and the general education student has a scheduled chemistry class. The student works with the chemistry teacher and the Unified coach to select an appropriate meaningful day that both students can attend, such as a lab day. On the given day, the Unified teammates go to class together and work together on the class activities.

The outcomes of this type of curricular crossover are threefold:

1. There is a benefit to special needs teammates as they can access grade-level content in an academic subject area.
2. The general education teammates learn valuable leadership and organization skills as they work with their coach, academic teacher and teammate.
3. These classes not only help teachers reframe their thinking on how to teach and include all students, but the special needs teammates provide valuable contributions to all of the students in class, and entire classes of students realize everyone has value in a unified community.

Final Thoughts

Unified Sports continue to change the landscape of high school athletics and create an environment that promotes equity and leadership while breaking traditional stereotypes. When adult leaders design multi-faceted Unified programs, they allow their communities to shine. General education and special needs students gain an opportunity to participate throughout the year instead of only a one-day event, and schools are more likely to experience long-term benefits of creating a more supportive and inclusive community for everyone.

Pandemic Intensifies Need to Retain, Recruit Officials for High School Sports

By Dr. Karissa Niehoff on October 14, 2020

[nfhs news](#)



In addition to the many new challenges for high school sports leaders this year, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified concerns regarding a longstanding issue – the shortage of high school sports officials.

At this time last year, we suggested that numerous veteran officials were retiring early, in large part, because of unruly behavior by parents. In some cases, officials were quitting before they even reached two years on the job – unwilling to take abuse from parents and other adult fans.

The [2017 survey](#) of 17,000-plus officials by the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO) supported our views about the effects of parents' behavior. While 42 percent of respondents said they started officiating for the love of the game, only nine percent responded that way when asked why they continue to officiate.

Although our messages were beginning to be heard across the country, we believe the pandemic will be an additional wake-up call for parents and other fans. Surely, after the events of the past seven months, these individuals will be grateful for any opportunity to attend contests this year and positively support student participants.

While the NASO survey indicated that the level of poor sportsmanship was worse in competitive youth sports (36%) and adult recreational sports (21%) than high school sports (14%), now – more than ever before – we urge parents to let players play and officials officiate.

On the flip side, however, while the pandemic may help with gaining stronger support for officials from parents and other fans, it has created other challenges – from the uncertain status of high school sports in some states to individuals opting not to return to officiating because of health concerns.

With the average age of officials nationally at about 53 years and many officials in their 60s, some individuals have not returned this fall due to COVID-19 concerns. In South Carolina, for instance, [more than 80 football officials opted out this year](#), causing some games to be moved to Thursday nights.

Although registration of officials is down in many other states, the numbers are expected to rise some when all sports are reinstated. State associations have encouraged numerous safety measures to protect officials, such as wearing of face masks and gloves, social distancing, suspension of handshakes and attending online preseason meetings.

In addition to retaining these incredible men and women currently serving as high school contest officials, recruiting new individuals to serve in this capacity is more urgent than ever.

Since 2017, the NFHS has been involved in a national campaign – [#BecomeAnOfficial](#) – to recruit and retain officials, and the program has achieved remarkable success. Now in its fourth year, more than 44,000 individuals have expressed interest in becoming an official and have contacted their state association to start the process.

In another silver lining to COVID-19, the interest in officiating is skyrocketing this year. In the first six weeks of the 2020-21 school year, almost 6,000 people have expressed interest in officiating high school sports and have signed up through the [#BecomeAnOfficial](#) website at [highschoolofficials.com](#). At this rate, almost 30,000 potential new officials would be identified by the end of the year – almost double the number from two years ago.

In the past, we have targeted specific groups of individuals that might be interested in officiating, such as college intramural sports directors, police, firefighters, EMTs, high school teachers and currently high school coaches.

Another possibility for the future comes from Tennessee – call it “All in the Family.” After Teresa Edmondson’s two sons finished their high school football careers at Mt. Juliet High School in 2017, she decided to keep high school sports alive in the family in a surprising way – she became a high school football official. Two years later, her son, Noah, joined her as a Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association referee. They have worked a couple of games together and are the only mother-and-son duo in the state.

Along with the incredible education-based teacher-coaches in our nation’s schools who have connected virtually and in-person with students during the pandemic, [the Edmondsons](#) are among the hundreds of thousands of men and women who sacrifice evenings throughout the year to serve as contest officials. They are the unsung heroes of high school sports.

Next week provides a great opportunity to recognize the individuals who serve in these roles as **National High School Activities Month** continues. Join the NFHS October 18-24 in celebrating **National Coaches, Advisors, Officials and Sponsors Week**.

More information on **National High School Activities Month** is available on the NFHS website at [NFHS.org/hsactivitiesmonth](https://www.nfhs.org/hsactivitiesmonth).

[Read all NFHS Voice columns here.](#)