

No simple solutions, but football season might have gained traction

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Fremont Ross football coach Chad Long saw athletic director Chad Berndt on caller ID early Friday evening.

Berndt told Long he had news.

"My heart dropped," Long said. "I thought they were calling everything in. He told us they had a plan for six games and the playoffs. That's awesome. It gives us more hope."

Long figures the announcement bodes well for a season being played this fall. Football has yet to be approved by the governor.

"It seems like no matter what, we'll have a season," he said. "We're just waiting for them to say we're not COVID testing. Then, everybody is out. It won't be feasible."

Athletic directors for schools in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference and each of three divisions in the Sandusky Bay Conference were to meet separately Monday to try to create schedules.

"It's not as simple as just getting in the same room," SBC commissioner Gregg Hedden said. "There have to be protocols and checks and balances. Things change every two or three days. We're trying to work through it to play sports.

"That's true for every board in the state. It isn't simple."



The Ohio High School Athletic Association recommended the season be shortened because of a potential spike in coronavirus cases later this year. Protocols continue to be modified for football, as well as soccer, to have games.

The first game is still scheduled for Aug. 24.

All teams make the playoffs after six weeks, beginning Oct. 9. The state championship games will be no later than Nov. 21.

"If we can go forward with an opportunity for student-athletes to play sports, it's awesome," Hedden said. "We're excited. Does it throw a wrench into things? Every conference is in the same situation.

"It is what it is. That's what we've all said for five months. Any way to find an opportunity for the kids to play."

Schools eliminated from the OHSAA playoffs or that choose not to enter have the option to schedule additional regular season contests through Nov. 14. A maximum of 10 regular season contests is permitted.

It won't matter how many games each team has played leading up to the playoffs. Instead of the computer ratings system determining which teams qualify for the playoffs, the coaches in each region will conduct a tournament seed meeting the week of Sept. 28 to form the regional bracket, similar to the process in other OHSAA team sports.

The number of playoff rounds depends on the number of schools entering the playoffs in each division.

Schools may keep their first six previously scheduled games, but all regular-season football contracts are now voidable by either school, especially in the event that conferences redo their league schedules to fit into the first six weeks. In addition, the OHSAA will determine new playoff regions in September.

The SBC divisions could conceivably move conference slates to the beginning of the season and add a game.

The situation is more problematic for Ross with Lucas County's plans for no fall sports. Clay won an appeal to play, but several other schools remain in limbo.

Plus, the Little Giants want to maintain their matchup with Sandusky, the second longest consecutive game streak in Ohio. That game was to be the third week.

Ross replaced Toledo Start with Bryan for Week 2. It might not stay that way.

Schools that are eliminated from the playoffs may continue to schedule regular-season games up until Nov. 14. Schools that have currently paused sports could still begin their season in September or early October and compete in the playoffs.

Schools are not required to enter the playoffs if they would rather play regular-season games up until Nov. 14.

A decision on spectators at contact sports has not yet been made. The OHSAA believes that at a minimum parents should be permitted to attend.

Long said the announcement bodes well for a season to be played.

"We anticipate playing," he said. "It would be a weird situation without fans in the stands. I'd be excited for these seniors to play their senior year. I hated it with wrestling and no baseball. I want these kids to be kids again and play.

"This is awesome news. There's concrete hope what to expect. It reaffirms they've been talking to the Governor. It's too late to switch to spring. I just want to play. If it's five games. I just want the kids to play."

He isn't dreading the next call from Berndt. He looks at it as a puzzle being solved.

"I know that you know that everybody knows there are still some unknowns,"
Long said.

That actually sounds promising amid the pandemic, albeit difficult to
contact trace.

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