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MHSAA Announces Football to Move to Spring Season for 2020-21

August 14, 2020

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EAST LANSING, Mich. - Aug. 14 - The Representative Council of the Michigan High School Athletic Association today announced it will move the 2020 Fall football season to Spring 2021, due to football's higher risk for spreading COVID-19, with the rest of Fall sports proceeding as scheduled.

The football season switch was made based on consultation with state health department officials and after surveying MHSAA member high schools on their progress and preferences after the first four days of practice. Football is considered a high-risk sport for potential spread of the COVID-19 virus because of its level of player-to-player contact.

A total of 34,219 student-athletes played football at MHSAA member schools during the 2019 season. A total of 520 11-player teams and 83 8-player teams were anticipated during late summer to play football this fall season.

"At the end of the day, we did everything we could to find a path forward for football this fall," MHSAA Executive Director Mark Uyl said. "But while continuing to connect with the Governor's office, state health department officials, our member schools' personnel and the Council, there is just too much uncertainty and too many unknowns to play football this fall.

"No one is willing to take the risk of COVID being passed on because of a high-risk sport. Decisions have to be made on our other sports as well, but none of those carry the same close, consistent, and face-to-face contact as football."

The MHSAA announced July 17 it would proceed this school year with its traditional calendar beginning with Fall sports but with enhanced precautions to help limit the spread of COVID-19. At that time, the MHSAA also stated it would move football, and other Fall sports seasons, to the spring of 2021 if they were deemed unsafe to proceed when originally scheduled. Football was allowed to begin practice, with helmets but no other padding, on Aug. 10.

Volleyball and soccer are considered moderate-risk for virus spread, while cross country, golf, tennis and swimming & diving are considered low-risk. Cross Country, Lower Peninsula girls golf and boys tennis and Upper Peninsula girls tennis began practice Aug. 12; golf and tennis teams may begin competing Aug. 19, and cross country teams may begin competing Aug. 21.

Volleyball, boys soccer and Lower Peninsula girls swimming & diving also began practice Aug. 12, and competition guidelines for those sports will be announced Aug. 19. Schools in regions under Phase 4 of the MI Safe Start Plan remain unable to play volleyball or swim/dive indoors due to governmental restrictions. Further guidance from Governor Gretchen Whitmer's office is expected in the near future regarding these indoor facilities.

Details for the spring football season including a specific schedule and format will be announced over the next few months. The MHSAA will be working to limit overlap of spring football and the traditional Spring sport seasons.

"While this is tremendously disappointing, we will do everything possible to provide the best possible experience in the spring while adding football into the calendar," Uyl said.

The MHSAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation of voluntary membership by more than 1,500 public and private senior high schools and junior high/middle schools which exists to develop common rules for athletic

eligibility and competition. No government funds or tax dollars support the MHSAA, which was the first such association nationally to not accept membership dues or tournament entry fees from schools. Member schools which enforce these rules are permitted to participate in MHSAA tournaments, which attract more than 1.4 million spectators each year.

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