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## Change of sports seasons a challenge for all in Lamorinda

By Jon Kingdon

It's been about five centuries since the four seasons of spring, summer, winter, and fall were established. It has taken the coronavirus only five months to alter the Gregorian calendar for high school sports in California. The California Interscholastic Federation announced July 29 that "in collaboration with our 10 sections, education-based athletics for the 2020-2021 school year will begin with a modified season of sport schedule."

There are now only two sports seasons - fall and spring. Winter, for all intents and purposes has been eliminated. The fall sports are cross country, football, water polo (boys and girls) and volleyball (boys and girls) with their first day of practice beginning on Dec. 14. In the spring, there are three different starting practice dates: Feb. 22 - soccer (boys and girls) and tennis (boys and girls), March 9 - swimming and diving and March 15 - wrestling, basketball, baseball, golf (boys and girls), lacrosse (boys and girls), softball and track and field.

This was a decision that the California Interscholastic Federation, the state's governing board for high school athletics, did not make easily, said Ron Nocetti, California's top prep sports administrator in the Bay Area News Group on July 21: "What started out with multiple plans came down to the one that everyone thought gave as many opportunities to as many students as possible to have close to a full season. This allows for our facilities to operate with less overlap and, while we do know that there are going to have to be some choices made, I think this is our best plan moving forward at this time. But as we've seen, no one can predict what's going to happen here."

The decision was a long time coming for the schools, said Raymond Meadows, Campolindo's athletic director: "We've been in a waiting game which is true in all facets of life now. We're just hoping to get back to some normalcy for these kids. The main issue for the CIF was that they did not want to cancel any sports or seasons outright."

Acalanes' Athletic Director Randy Takahashi had anticipated that there was going to be a delay in the fall season: "I knew that in conversations with the CIF and North Coast Section that there were a lot of things they had to take into consideration such as what most of the school districts were doing, such as going to distance learning which necessitated pushing everything back to December."

Working out the details for their schools' athletic teams is going to take an expert in algorithmic analysis, particularly in the early spring when football, two soccer teams, two lacrosse teams and the track and field team will all be competing for time on the practice fields. "There's going to be a lot of planning and we're going to have to strike a balance within our coaching staffs," Meadows said, "but I think everybody, including our parents and athletes are staying positive with the idea that we're going to get the kids back on the fields, gyms and pools."

With things changing constantly, it's an ongoing process that makes it difficult to predict how things will look once the "fall" season begins in December, Takahashi said: "I'm meeting with all of the field sport coaches and discussing with them how we're going to use the stadium."

Despite having to wait until December to begin practicing, the football coaches are as a group glad to know that there is going to be a season. "The whole process had us so worn down, we were going to be happy with anything," Campolindo head coach Kevin Macy said. "The way it stands now, we're pleasantly surprised that we're going to be able to have a scrimmage and a 10-game season and some playoffs. The reset may work in a lot of ways - January may feel like the start of school for everybody."

The inability to have a summer program won't, in the long term, affect the football teams, Acalanes head coach Floyd Burnsed said: "With practices starting on Dec. 14, we'll have ample time to prepare for the season. We can work out now in groups of 12 and we're allowed to share equipment so our QB's and WR's can throw and catch."

Miramonte head coach Jack Scharff is looking forward to when larger groups of players will be able to work out against each other, but will accept whatever comes his way: "Before the season starts, we would like to be able to run 7 on 7's against other teams, something that we have normally done in the summer. If we can get any type of activity in early we'll do that, but if we can't, we'll just have to be ready to go on Dec. 14."

A majority of the states are planning to play high school football in the fall, though that number can change daily. It may be prohibitive to play in January through March in Green Bay, Wisconsin where the average temperatures for each month are 18, 21 and 32 degrees. The average temperature for Lamorinda in those months is 47, 52 and 54 degrees, which is not the major concern for the coaches - it's that these months are the height of the rainy season. "We're aware of the weather conditions at that time of the year," Macy said. "However, with a new quarterback and running backs, if we get the heavy rain, that will definitely affect us by making it harder to put our offense together."

"If we get a lot of rain, it's going to be a mess," Takahashi said. "Putting the rain and temperature aside, at the end of the day, if we're out there playing sports, whether it's raining or not, everybody will look at it and say that it's pretty awesome that we're back."

With so many sports overlapping, there is a concern as to how things will work out for the multi-sport athletes and it is an issue that is being addressed, according to Meadows: "There were some discussions in our league meetings about the possibility of some teams not having enough athletes. The coaches understand that this is going to be a little bit different and practice times may be a little bit scarcer, but we

want our kids to have the opportunity to play multiple sports. I'm asking our coaches to be flexible and to think outside the box to figure out how to make this work with a completely different framework from what we've been used to."

Normally girl's tennis, golf and volleyball were played in the fall and the boys teams played in the spring, but bringing them all together in the spring seemed to make the most sense, according to Michael McCollum, Miramonte's boys and girls tennis coach: "Consolidating the tennis seasons is what I thought was going to happen. It's the best thing for the kids and the efforts that have gone into arranging the seasons is an indication of real professionalism by our administrators, school, and sports leaders. I'm hoping we can get in 10 league matches. The matches are doable, but the hard part is going to be trying to figure out how I can get enough drivers to get our players to the matches."

With both teams sharing the season, court time will be at a premium. Fortunately for Miramonte and Acalanes, their courts have stadium lights which will allow them to split the practices and play later in the evening. "I'm hopeful and happy that this is all going to work out," McCollum said. "I have two of the best teams in the area and I'm anxious about showing them off."

Campolindo, like Acalanes and Miramonte, has lighting on the football field but not on the tennis courts. "We need lights and we've been trying to get lights, but we won't have them this year," said Meadows. "This may lead to shorter practices and in the past, we have had to move some of our games off site to places that did have lights so we're thinking creatively on how we can still offer as much as we can, but we may run into some scheduling issues along the way."

Meadows also raises the possibility of some teams practicing before school: "The CIF rules that you can practice 18 hours so some of our teams like aquatics and basketball in the past have at times used the early hours to get their workouts in. It's not done too often and if it were to affect the kids, we will find different ways to work things out."

The athletic directors have not been operating in a bubble and have all been working together to make the best of a difficult situation, Takahashi said: "Amy McNamara, the associate superintendent in the district office, has put aside time every week and half to go over what our status is so we have had a lot of support and communication from the district office. We've have been hearing from athletic directors from other districts and they're not getting anywhere near the kind of guidance we've received about opening things up."

It was John Jay (1813), one of our country's founding fathers that said, "To hope for the best and prepare for the worst, is a trite but a good maxim." It's an attitude that everyone is forced to live by today.

"It's been a roller coaster," said Meadows. "There has to be a lot of things to happen for all of us to be out there playing in December. I'm crossing my fingers and we're going to plan for it accordingly. If everyone goes in with an open mind and are flexible and accommodating, knowing that it's not exactly how we have done it in the past or want it to be, we'll take it, having the kids out there even with the adjustments that we'll all have to make."

Reach the reporter at: [sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com)

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