

WHS winter sports open season without fans

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Friday's season opening basketball game against Axtell was a lot quieter than usual.

Due to statewide precautions to stop the spread of COVID-19, no spectators will be allowed to attend winter sporting events until at least the end of January.

KSHSAA's Board of Directors met virtually November 24 to discuss the winter sports season and make adjustments surrounding the recent climb in COVID cases in the state of Kansas.

Although a proposal would have delayed the start of winter sports to the end of January, the board voted to continue with the sports season on time, starting December 1. There will be a mandatory but extended moratorium from December 22 to January 8, which may affect early games for some teams next semester.

The biggest change to the season is rules surrounding spectators. At this time, no spectators are allowed to attend sporting events for junior high or high school. This restriction will stretch to January 28, when the board will revisit the decision.

This decision by the board has been appealed, and a hearing was held December 4. Although it has been appealed, the BOD will ultimately have the final say in the decision. The Board of Director's revisited the discussion of spectator attendance at games in a meeting Tuesday afternoon. Updates on this vote can be found whscharger.com.

Though no spectators will be allowed, band and cheerleaders will be permitted to perform at games, though this is up to the discretion of each individual school. According to athletic director Jaron Weisshaar, WHS plans to allow these events to continue throughout the season.

Other changes included mandatory masks for anyone except active participants and officials, and limits on the number of participating teams allowed at an event, which will mostly affect wrestling and basketball tournaments. KSHSAA made modifications to each individual sport, such as the elimination of handshakes and an opening jump ball in basketball.

See the full list for basketball, wrestling, pep band and cheer considerations at kshsaa.org.

Head basketball coaches Trevor

Keller and Christian Ulsaker agree that though the game itself will continue almost as normal, the lack of support for the players is an unusual and disappointing situation.

"The only change that has impacted play on the court is the elimination of the jump ball to start the game. I believe the greatest difference between this year and previous years will be playing without fans," Keller said in an email. "It is extremely unfortunate that KSHSAA made the decision to eliminate fans until at least January 28. I am hopeful that after KSHSAA holds an appeal hearing on Friday December 4th, a revision to the fan attendance policy happens and at a minimum parents are allowed to attend games."

"The rules to the game itself won't have much effect on the overall game play," Ulsaker said, "I truly wish parents would be able to watch their sons play the game they love. I hope the band and cheerleaders are extra loud during our game. That could be a big home court advantage having a rowdy band section!"

Senior basketball player Madison Wertzberger says the season will likely be the same for her, but that the lack of spectators is disheartening. "It's really disappointing that my parents can't come watch me play my senior year," Wertzberger said.

In an article published in the Topeka Capital Journal, KSHSAA executive director Bill Faflick commented on the board's decision. "It has been emotion and emotional every time there's been restrictions put in place where people haven't been able to attend contests involving their kids, alma mater or favorite school," Faflick said. "We've seen that through the fall. But something's not working because community spread is continuing... We've got to start somewhere. Can we dial it back eventually? Certainly that's a possibility. But right now the board has deemed that the cleanest, safest way to do this based on what doctors are saying is this is primarily a disease that is spread through adults and their interactions and if we can limit those interactions we will be better for that."

Although Charger fans can't attend the games in person, all home and league events can still be streamed online through the NFHS network. Subscription information can be found at usd329.com.



Junior Lauren Schutter shoots Friday against Axtell. Schutter led the team with 20 points and 14 rebounds. The Chargers opened the season without fans in the stands due to restrictions enacted by the Kansas High School Activities Association.

Left: Senior Tyler Lohmeyer faces a triple team under the basket in the first half of Friday's game. Lohmeyer scored 11 points and grabbed 8 rebounds in the 42-41 loss.

Photos by Ava Meinhardt.

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

How do you feel about the KSHSAA decision to start the winter sports season on time, but to keep out spectators until at least the end of January because of COVID-19 precautions?

"It was the right decision to start the season on time. Dr. Fauci has repeatedly said how vital it is for students to be in school and doing school activities. No Spectators was a tough decision, but if it's what we are truly doing this for the athletes and this was the only way for it to happen, then this is the way it's going to be."

Special education teacher Christian Ulsaker

"It doesn't make sense because they are still allowing cheerleaders and pep band. They should allow two spectators per player."

Senior Peter Stuhsatz

"I don't think it's fair to the people who participate in winter sports and their parents, it is going to be really quiet and awkward in the gym and if something happens to one of the kids their parents can't do anything about it, but I kind of understand why they are doing it."

Freshman Hannah Sievers

"I think it is good that they are still starting winter sports because we don't want to miss out on another sport due to COVID but it does make me sad that the parents and family members aren't going to get to see their kids play what might end up being their last high school sport in person but at the same time I believe that it is the safest option."

Senior Jordan Magette

"I'm happy that the kids get to compete. It has to be tough on parents not being able to be at the games watching their kid(s) play, but it's a whole lot better than the alternative of not having the seasons happen."

Social studies teacher Jess Rutledge

"I think it's a pretty good decision, but at the same time it will be weird because the athletes won't have a Crowd cheering them on."

Freshman Matthew Vanstory

"I cannot fully express my true feelings on this survey. It seems beyond ridiculous to keep restricting us when we all know the risks and are able to deal with them."

Science Teacher Lisa Hull

"I think it makes sense because a bunch of people got sick at state volleyball and we had to shut the whole school down."

Junior Justin Carlson

I feel good about them continuing sports, but I feel as if the only reason KSHSAA won't allow spectators is because they wouldn't follow mask protocols and the 6 feet on the bleachers. I still feel as it is a smart idea to not allow people in other than coaches and team members because of the rise of COVID-19 in Wabaunsee.

Freshman Blake Murphy

SPORTS BRIEFS | GIRLS BASKETBALL OPENS WITH 53-14 WIN OVER AXTELL

Jacob Meseke
@jacob_meseke

Winter sports season started this weekend with basketball at home against Axtell and the wrestling team faced Abilene, Sabetha, and Ottawa in a home quad.

Girls basketball won easily against Axtell 53-14. Junior Lauren Schutter was the Chargers leading scorer with 20 points and also 14 rebounds. Senior Madisyn Wertzberger scored 11 points and 8 rebounds. Freshman Karli Meseke scores 9 points as well.

"After only having 6 practices to prepare, I thought we came out and competed really well," head coach Trevor Keller said. "Early on we gave up a few easy baskets, but after the first two minutes we

were able to settle in and went on a 31-3 run to close the first half. Some areas that we need to improve are rebounding, taking care of the ball and executing our half court offense. Overall, it was a good first game but we have a long way to go in order to be playing at a high level in February and March."

Coach Keller liked how freshmen stepped up in the game.

"I thought that Karli (Meseke) and Taryn (Maike) played extremely well for it being their first game at the high school level," said Keller.

The boys lost in heartbreaking fashion against Axtell 42-41. Junior Cade Oliver scored 18 points and had 3 steals. Senior Tyler Lohmeyer scored 11 points and hauled in 8 rebounds.

"The Axtell game was a learn-

ing experience. We did some good things, but as we all know have a lot to work on. I thought Mondays practice was our best yet. I'm looking forward to our game against Manhattan Chief," said head coach Christian Ulsaker.

Ulsaker went to Twitter after the game to tweet his feelings.

"Last night hurt. Lost on a last second layup. We have a lot to improve on. Games like this will humble you as a coach and player. Time to get back to work."

Coach Ulsaker loves Oliver's toughness and Dawson Schultz stepping up.

"I loved Cade's energy and toughness. Kid is a natural talent. Dawson really stepped up and played well. He didn't try to do too much and played his game. I loved

to see that about him," said Ulsaker.

On Saturday the wrestling team hosted a quad against Abilene, Sabetha, and Ottawa. Senior Eli Mumpower and Junior Jackson Havenstein both had 2 wins on the day. Senior Derek Wallin and freshmen Alex Beggs and Cody Berkenmeier all had one win

"We did okay for only having one week of practice," said head coach Joey Heersche.

Basketball will compete in the Wabaunsee Invitational Basketball Tournament this week on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. On Tuesday they will play Manhattan CHIEF, on Thursday they will play Northern Heights, and on Friday they will play Frankfort.

Wrestling will compete Saturday in a tournament at Clay Center.