

Fall Sports Lacked Guidance

Fall sports lacked the guidance they needed from IHSAA and IHSGAU.



(Left) Ava Smithson '24 waits for a ball during a game. Volleyball had a good year in the midst of the pandemic going 19-15.



(Right) Bella Heikes '21 runs during the conference meet. Heikes was the top runner for girls during their state championship year.



(Right) Jack Rutz '22 throws the ball during the game. Rutz lead the team to a 3-5 record including a upset against #1 Dowling Catholic.



(Left) Yohana Yual '21 wins the conference meet. Yual was the top runner for a top ten team in the state.

The editorial is an opinion held by the editorial board of the newspaper and is a collaboration of the board. It needs a simple majority to pass. This month's vote was 5-0.

The Iowa High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) and the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union (IGHSAU) have not handled things well during the global pandemic. They have been very strict about eligibility and very loose in teams listening to the guidelines. Whether it be forcing students who moved from another state to sit out their sport, to being inconsistent in between sports, or to rarely enforcing the guidelines that they set in July. When the country shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many athletes in the Class of 2021 were left wondering if they would be able to play their senior year. When the time came for the IHSAA to determine whether or not it was safe to play, they decided to have fall sports, however many states did the opposite. The decision to play fall sports led many seniors, mainly those who played football, from other states to pick up their lives and move to Iowa so they could finish out their high school career and get scholarships to go to D-1 schools. As a state there were a few elite players and many lesser known players fighting for a chance to go D-1. The lesser known athletes were able to play with little to no problems, but the stars that moved had to undergo many stressful weeks wondering

if they would even be able to play. The Johnston Athletic Director, Josh Tobey said, "It's challenging for families having to make a really tough decision about what to do in the times that we are living in." Arland Bruce '21 IV of Ankeny, moved from a Kansas City suburb and had to sit out nearly half the year because his siblings did not move with him. The IHSAA claims that he has dual residency living in both Ankeny and Kansas City. Bruce has not traveled back to Kansas City since he moved at the start of the season. This should have been enough to let him play as this is what nearly everyone else in the country did. The IHSAA ruled him ineligible when he thought he was following all the rules. He appealed in what was an unnecessarily long process and took weeks to be completed. The IHSAA even disqualified another player in what seemed like an attempt to prove their point. Tobey said, "They [Appeals] are time consuming, they are expensive, and they are emotional for all the parties involved." These student athletes who just wanted a chance to play during their senior year were left with a lot of pressure and anxiety because of the appeals that had to be made to make their transfer worth it. The other player was an Elite 11 quarterback

from Colorado who went to Valley. He had no problems with the transfer until the Bruce situation gained national attention. They finally reversed their decision after thousands of complaints came in including from 2020 Super Bowl MVP Patrick Mahomes. Mahomes tweeted, "Let my man @abruceiv play! Kid wants to play his senior year of football why stop him?? @IHSAA". The thing is these athletes should have never had to wait to play. They made sure they had followed the rules, but apparently since they were star athletes it was different, and they were not able to play. On the IHSAA website it says under guidelines, "Students in a district not offering the sport may open enroll to another district and would be immediately eligible to participate in that sport. In such a situation, students who open enroll would be ineligible for varsity competition in all sports which their home district offers. As per 36.15(4) (a)". This makes it look like the athletes that transferred from other states should've been able to play. This would have brought more national attention to Iowa high school football as there would have been an even better pool of athletes playing in Iowa. In the summer before the seasons started

they came out with guidelines for each sport. They left mandating some or all of these guidelines up to each school. Due to the increase in cases and quarantines, the IHSAA and IGHSAU should have considered mandating masks especially for indoor sports as they were at a higher risk for the virus to spread. In addition they had many guidelines to follow but did not implement them well. In the guidelines they do not tell athletes in close contact sports that they have to wear a mask. In a time when going back to school made the cases skyrocket an outbreak was unavoidable. To counter this they should have mandated wearing a mask while competing as that would have limited the exposure. These rules are not keeping people safe especially in football where they are in close contact with other players for the majority of the game. At Johnston we saw this multiple times during the season. In the early part of the season the freshman football team had to quarantine, because someone on the team got the virus and the team was not wearing masks in practice. The same thing happened for the varsity football team at the last game of the year. Luckily they did not have to miss any games as their season was over.

When they made the guidelines they left the majority of it up to individual conferences and districts. Josh Tobey said "That would [athletes wearing masks while competing] be an individual, district decision and I'll be honest we are trending to wearing them full time." This is what the IHSAA and IGHSAU should have said from the beginning and not leave it up to schools to make the right choice. In the midst of all this the sport that was affected the most was the cross country teams even though they were the second safest sport, only behind boys golf. Many of the JV meets were limited to a very small number of runners from each school. For some meets this was up to the owners of the location where the meet was held. Even though this wasn't entirely the fault of the IHSAA and the IGHSAU they did not have many solutions for schools that held their own meet to have the full teams run. When the individual school had to decide how many runners from each team would be allowed, they were never given a guideline of what amount would make it more risky for the athletes. They did a bad job of helping these runners have meets even though they allowed the freshman and JV teams of other, higher risk sports to play.

They were very relaxed with the guidelines in other sports too. In volleyball it is stated as wearing a mask is permissible. The argument could be made that the masks should have been made mandatory for the safety of both teams. They play inside so the virus is easier to spread since it is in a confined space. Even if the athletes wore them, they were not required to have the mask on the right way. They were able to pull it down underneath their chin during the game so the mask did nothing to prevent the spread of COVID-19. They mandated masks for the spectators, but why did they not mandate masks for the athletes. If watching a game was not safe without a mask then why would playing the game be safe without a mask. They did a good job in creating guidelines and ideas to keep athletes safe, but what good does it do when it is not enforced. The IHSAA had at least three months to devise a plan for each sport and ended up with a bunch of good guidelines that were not made mandated as they should have for the safety of the athletes. They needed to tell school districts that they had to follow those specific guidelines for the safety of their athletes instead of just encouraging them to follow the guidelines.