Meeting: NYSPHSAA COVID-19 TASK FORCE

Date: Wednesday, July 16, 2020 Video Conference Call

Topics Discussed:
Recap of June 10th meeting, Updates from Governor’s Office, Official Guidance from State, Update from NYSED, Proposals to Address Crisis, ezSCRN by TCM, Next Steps for NYSPHSAA & Membership, Next Meeting

1. Welcome
NYSPHSAA President Paul Harrica called the meeting to order at 9:01 am. He discussed the information released by the State this week.

2. Review of June 30th meeting
Dr. Robert Zayas introduced special guests at today’s meeting: Darryl Daily, Don Buckley, Jenna Halpin (SAAC), Zach Durr (SAAC). He announced Karen Hollowood and Anne Laroue from NYSED would not be able to attend. Robert referenced the minutes of the last meeting on page 2 of the packet as well as the discussion of the six possible scenarios and the screening application ezSCRN. Robert discussed the results of the COVID-19 survey results which saw nearly 2,500 responses (2,000 were coaches). He referenced numerous pages of the results which included a look at the 359 athletic directors who responded. Darryl indicated the emphasis on health and safety in his report.

3. Official Guidance from State
Robert referenced the 23-page document from NYS Department of Health provided to him. He pointed to numerous pages in the NYSDOH packet associated with guidance from the State. He provided the statement from the NYSDOH released on July 13th stating: "Interscholastic athletics are not permitted at the time of publication and must only operate in accordance with forthcoming State issued guidance." Kathy asked if the survey results were on the web site and Robert said it will be posted next week.

NYSPHSAA Lobbyist Kevin Banes provided a brief report indicating the State officials are making decisions based on the data and new infection rates across the state. He said State officials recognize the importance of interscholastic activities in a school setting but are focused on the health of the student athlete. He believes the last thing they want to do is allow HS sports to restart only to stop again if infectious rates begin to increase. He expects additional guidance regarding school activities, which could include interscholastic competition to come out over the next couple weeks but that’s based on speculation. Paul recognized the next announcement from the Governor is expected to come August 7th.

4. Update from NYS Department of Health – Jill Dunkel
No report provided by NYSDOH.
5. Proposals to Address Crisis

Paul Harrica referenced Tom Combs and Jim Wright’s proposal. Tom explained the proposal which would be geared toward implementing athletics after the “second wave” yet still get in all the seasons. Jim indicated there are numerous factors that will need to be in line including a change in the practice rule, officials, and postseason.

Adam Stoltman inquired about the last date of the last season in the proposal, which was May 3rd to June 13th and suggested exploring athletics going into July of 2021. Paul noted as a superintendent, it may be a concern for unions and coaches if athletics went past June 30th.

Paul called on Chris Ceruti to discuss her proposal. She explained her two proposals which both were having later start dates in the fall.

Paul called on Kathy Hoyt to discuss a proposal submitted by Section Executive Directors. She emphasized regular season, no travel, limited participation numbers on individual sports. Her ideas align with Tom, Jim and Chris’ proposals.

Paul called on Robert Zayas to share his proposal, “NYSPHSAA Pause”. Robert first referenced his discussions with superintendents, athletic directors, executive directors and staff which appears to all point to the opinion that we will not start fall sports on time, August 24th. He explained a concept New Jersey has that may be something to consider in New York. Robert’s proposal is to pause athletics until September 21st so we can wait for the Governor’s next announcement the first week of August then make a decision. The proposal also eliminates all fall regional events and state championships in addition to waiving the seven-day practice rule, maintaining practice requirements and encouraging geographic scheduling for games and contests. He asked Kevin Banes if we pause athletics, could that hurt us? Kevin said it shows NYSPHSAA is paying attention to the bigger picture and the Task Force and the Officers are making their decisions based on the safety of the student athletes. He indicated club sports could get pulled back if spikes continue.

Robert also referenced the NYSPHSAA Constitution in which the officers of the association have the ability to decide on a committee recommendation in case they cannot convene the Central/Executive Committee. Robert asked for thoughts on pausing athletics until September. Dennis Burkett stated he supported the NYSPHSAA Pause plan and Tom Combs and Jim Mackin agreed since they wanted to see schools have time to plan. Jim Mackin added even if the Governor allows athletics before September, schools may not be ready to implement athletics anyway. Scott Barker agreed and noted we should look at numerous options so we can pivot as needed. Rick Knizek agreed with the pause but asked if we would consider a “flip” of the fall and spring seasons due to the numbers. If a flip occurred, testing of COVID could be managed with less numbers in the fall and more could be done in the spring when we can prepare. Matt Walentuck expressed his concern that the educational setting is top priority and felt it was premature to determine what sports we play in what seasons. Chris Ceruti agreed.

Chris Durdon referenced the guidance that stated 12’ physical distancing and that it may be wise to strongly consider planning for low risk sports now to get something off the ground. Robert responded if we move baseball and softball to the fall the season it would not be beneficial for those student-athletes. There is no assurance they will start on time or have a full season in the fall. Schools may not be prepared for these sports to swap seasons either. Chris Ceruti said baseball and softball athletes are not worried about that, they just want to get on a field and play a season. Jim Wright indicated the socioeconomic divide between club and school sports and it could lead to bigger issues. Robert asked are administrators prepared to play baseball and softball in the fall, getting fields, staff and athletes ready? Adam Stoltman agreed with Robert, felt it would be difficult and said we should have a simple direction.

Paul asked if there’s a motion where we want to go at this time.

MOTION made by Dennis Burkett to pause athletics until September 21st and implement Option B (condensed
seasons) if the fall seasons are impacted. **SECOND** by Carl Normandin.

**DISCUSSION:** Rick asked how far ahead we can provide notice on this and if/when sections can make decisions about what sports can be implemented. Robert noted a section can make decisions as they want but would hope sections would be careful going out on their own. Jim Dexter indicated his superintendents group had concerns about various things including planning, grievances, and maintenance. Superintendents are going to want advanced knowledge of coaching certificates, appointments and stipends to name a few concerns. Chris Ceruti suggested three start dates and asked for clarification on Sept 21st or Jan 4th. Robert stated we would start with September 21st and see what is announced next by the Governor. He noted that he stated “tentative” and “dates can change” on the proposal so we aren’t locked into dates. Jim Mackin said we know we are reopening schools in some way but don’t know what it looks like so its in our best interest to move things forward with the pause until September 21st. Jim Wright asked to call the vote. Ivan Katz supports any kind of pause because he believes all sports will be paused this year anyway. He noted various reopening plans and ideas that will complicate sports being played. A pause shows we are paying attention to all these factors.

Paul called for the vote. **VOTE:** 21 in favor. 0 against.

6. **ezSCRN by TCM Application**

Todd Nelson explained the screening possibilities with ezSCRN and asked if the committee would support the use of ezSCRN. It would not be required for a school to use ezSCRN however Robert referenced page 2 of the NYSDOH guidance about a mandated screening process needed for schools. Robert noted ezSCRN complies with the ED 2D Law and HIPAA law as well. Todd indicated numerous districts have already inquired about using ezSCRN and that pricing is determined by a single school or can be done by a league or section to secure better rates. Chris Ceruti wasn’t sure if this committee can endorse it but said we should support ezSCRN as the application to use. Scott Barker said the app is great but there’s a couple things to tighten up like entering students into the app. Ivan asked if we are supporting just this vendor? He would not support just one vendor, rather options for schools. Robert noted the pre-existing strong relationship with ezSCRN and this one would meet the needs of our schools since we already have determined that. Jim Dexter noted he has to be careful to endorse this due to schools being subject to specific conflict of interest laws. Todd emphasized ezSCRN has already worked with schools and we’ve had a good relationship with this vendor. Renee James offered to come up with proper language to support working with TCM to use ezSCRN. Robert read off language he had for a drafted press release and Renee thought it was sufficient. Matt Walentuck asked if the company was providing sponsorship dollars to our association. Todd indicated we receive in-kind benefits such as special pricing for schools. Chris Joyce, Director of Marketing, noted we do not receive compensation or other benefits, so they are considered just a “partner” not a sponsor.

7. **Next Steps**

Paul Harrica indicated our next steps will be to distribute information about our NYSPHSAA Pause for athletics starting September 21st. He noted our Central Committee meeting is in two weeks if there is anything else to be discussed or voted on. Robert shared the process of dealing with the media after the meeting. He said the Director of Communications, Chris Watson, sets up a video conference call following Task Force meetings so questions can be answered all at once. Today there will be a 3 pm press conference video call.

8. **Next Meeting**

Paul suggested the next meeting be conducted after the Central Committee meeting sometime in early August. Carl suggested later in the week of August 7th because of the Governor’s announcement expected then.

**ADJOURNMENT** - Paul asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. **MOTION** by Ivan Katz, **SECOND** Jim Dexter. All were in favor. Adjourned at 10:29 am.

Minutes respectfully taken and submitted by NYSPHSAA Assistant Director Joe Altieri; reviewed/approved by President and Chair Paul Harrica & Executive Director Dr. Robert Zayas on 7/20/20 @ 1:14 pm prior to distribution.