
LEADERSHIP IN COACHING EDUCATION

How COVID Impacted Sports?

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Abstract

For the past two years, COVID 19 has impacted all aspects of society. School went online, games were postponed, tournaments were cancelled, and many high school athletes lost their ‘last shot at forever.’ This paper discusses the negative and positive impacts that COVID 19 has had on school sports.

Everyone probably remembers where they were when 9/11 happened. I (Stacy) was in my first-year teaching and students came in telling me that an airplane had crashed into the world trade center. I figured they were just trying to get me to turn on the TV for them to watch something more entertaining in Biology than the cell theory. Nineteen years later in the year 2020, a similar date resonates. I was celebrating my birthday in March on a Monday with no school and it was not a snow day. The governor had a press conference the night before and declared all North Dakota schools were closed until further notice due to COVID infections on the rise in the US.

Many thought students would be back to school in two weeks, only to find out they would finish the school year with everything done through online learning. Winter sport state championships were paused and then eventually cancelled, and all spring sports were cancelled. After the summer, everyone was hopeful that school and sports would be back to normal for teachers, students, and athletes.

Unfortunately, the 2020-2021 school year was anything but ‘back to normal’. Many schools continued with alternative methods of teaching

and extracurricular activities were curtailed, and if offered, they were anything but ‘normal’.

In this paper we will briefly review some of the negative and positive aspects in North Dakota high school sports resulting from the COVID epidemic.

Negative Aspects

The negatives from COVID vary, but ultimately, people getting sick, or even worse, from the virus impacted people for extended periods of time. Many people were quarantined for 10-14 days, some multiple times. I (Stacy) coach volleyball and I saw negative consequences to the virus affecting my athletes.

Anxiety for Players and Coaches

Players came into the fall 2020 season hopeful and anxious to play, with many of them having already missed their spring sport seasons. Many were scared to be infected or having to quarantine again. My team practiced their entire season wearing masks during practice all season long and not once did a player outright complain. Masks were warm and made it tough to breath, but it gave a small amount of safety or protection from other individuals.

Towards the end of the volleyball season, our region coaches agreed to wear masks during post season matches to protect our athletes from possible exposure during a match. An anxiety for all as we neared post season, was that anyone or a team could be eliminated before having a chance at post season advancement due to possible virus exposure.

Loss of Games

The opportunity to play games in ND was a gift as we other states cancel or postpone the start of their fall high sport seasons (Next College Student Athlete, nd). In ND, one negative or loss that volleyball faced, was the elimination of invitational tournaments during the fall season. As a result, athletes did lose out on opportunities to gain experience, but, they were still getting to play their conference games.

Financial Losses

The financial ramifications were visible at many levels. Many schools restricted attendance during the season to only parents attending, or no fans at all. This revenue at the door, concession stand, and in the community was felt by all.

At the state level, the North Dakota High School Activities Association (NDHSAA) took a financial hit. The region volleyball post season matches had a limited number of guests allowed, which lowered revenue. The state B boys basketball tournament in 2020 was cancelled, which is usually the largest revenue source for tournaments. In 2019-2020, the boys' basketball season had a revenue of \$145,422.10 and the 2020-2021 season saw a revenue of \$373,819.40 (NDHSAA, 2021). This does not include the revenue that the host city lost in hotels, food, and shopping in the community. According to NDHSAA Executive Director Matt Fetch, about 60 percent of the NDHSAA's annual revenue is profit from post season tournaments (Devillers, 2020). The association can handle missing one season, but multiple seasons make it tough to bounce back from.

Positive Aspects

It might be hard to believe that the COVID virus would shine light on any positive experiences, but it did bring some.

Time to Heal

Many student-athletes are three or even four sport athletes, and in the spring of 2020, these individuals were forced to shut down. There were

no practices, games, private lessons, or open gyms to go to because nothing was open. The athletes were allowed, or in some cases, forced, to rest, relax, and heal their bodies.

Dedicated athletes rarely get a break from their preferred sport. Volleyball players who play in a region tournament, start basketball practice the following Monday, giving them a weekend of rest. After basketball and hockey season, athletes may get two weeks off, but if they participate in track, practice for the indoor season begins right after basketball is done. Training often continues throughout the summer and nagging injuries and brain fog tend to become evident.

COVID gave a forced break of the mind and body as well as increased time with family at home. It was a time to reconnect and play games or help with online learning homework. I (Stacy) know our family appreciated the short time of slowing down and enjoying time together. It gave children an opportunity to miss their sport and teammates and connect with their family again.

Change in Game Protocols

Most sports that were allowed to continue during the 2020-21 season faced new safety protocols. Most of these protocol changes served as a way of decreasing COVID exposure. In volleyball, teams did not switch sides after each set and the level of disinfecting balls, equipment, and locker rooms increased. Most officials used electronic whistles instead of the typical Fox 40 whistle. This was a good change in two ways. First, gone was the shrillness of the whistle blown at the end of each play and second, the electronic whistle eliminated airborne droplets from the traditional whistle. The changes in the volleyball season that occurred helped protect players, coaches, and officials, and should continue.

Increased Game Streaming

The ability to stream sports, contests, and other school events increased dramatically for every school district. Teams were able to use online services, such as Facebook, NFHS network, or YouTube, to share matches or games which allowed fans to watch their favorite student-athletes when they were restricted from attending in person. We hope this continues to

remain available to all teams and fans in the future.

Family Time

The last positive to the COVID experience was that athletes competed with and without fans at matches and games. From this, some athletes had more of an appreciation for their parents attending their games and supporting them in their athletic career. Most athletes enjoy their parents supporting them in a positive manner, which does not always happen for all athletes (Strand et al., 2021).

Conversely, some athletes were not upset when a family member could not attend a match because they were not always supportive or positive. Parents have to allow coaches to be the ones who give feedback and be the coach for their son or daughter (O'Sullivan, 2019). Far too often, the ride home in a car is often a nightmare for kids. As parents were limited from attending games, athletes had the opportunity to ride the bus home with their peers and bond with their teammates.

Conclusion

COVID has reshaped the realm of sports in both negative and positive ways. The negative impacts are anxiety for players and coaches, lost opportunities to play and improve with fewer tournaments to play in, and financial losses to programs and communities. The positive impacts include athlete's bodies healing and having a chance to "miss" a sport, changes to game protocol, increased streaming opportunities, and athletes appreciating their families/fans supporting them at their events.

It is hoped that many of the sport related COVID restrictions disappear in the future as sport get 'back to normal'. However, some changes proved positive and hopefully will continue in the future and become part of the 'new normal'.

References

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