

NYSPHSAA approves plan for fewer games ?

It's official.

The New York State Public High School Athletic Association voted Saturday on a number of cost-cutting proposals and the biggest of them all, a mandatory decrease in the maximum number of regular season games permitted, was approved.

In layman's terms, high school teams across the state will be forced to compete in fewer games than had been allowed before.

Sports such as baseball and softball, which once allowed for 24 games, will be cut back to 20. Those that typically played 20 will now play 18; 18 game-seasons are now cut to 16. Section II football, however, is likely to maintain a seven-game regular season with two playoff or crossover games allotted for all teams.

In other money-saving moves, the NYSPHSAA agreed to support conference calls and video conferencing for association meetings, use officials from the host section in regional contests and eliminated mandatory attendance of coaches and administrators at NYSPHSAA workshops.

"The rationale supporting these incremental reductions will have a significant impact for our member schools," NYSPHSAA Executive Director Nina Van Erk wrote in the association's press release. "For example, the savings realized by schools may act to protect lower level programs such as modified from being eliminated."

Not so fast, says Gary VanDerzee, the Section II football Coordinator and former Athletic Director and current head football coach at Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk High School. By his estimate, a school in R-C-S's position would cut 82 contests affecting 700 student athletes to save between \$9,000 and \$10,000 - 0.025% of the school budget.

Times are tough for high schools, as evidenced by the Emma Willard School announcing last week that it will decline to renew the contracts of some of their 140 employees by July 1 as a means to save \$1.5 million over the next two years. By cutting games, however, especially the boys and girls basketball games that rake in money on admissions, the NYSPHSAA may actually hurt schools that use that money to fund other sports. And it certainly will not make a dent on the academic side of the budget, says VanDerzee. "It won't save one teacher's job," he said. "It's strictly a face-saving measure on the part of the administrators that don't want to make a hard decision and just want to pass the buck on to everybody else."



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Booster clubs that raise money primarily through 50-50 raffles and concession stand sales will see a decrease in profits if teams lose home games. Small towns and villages that rally around their young athletes also figure to lose goodwill in the community and positive budget votes with fewer games played at high school facilities.

"An absolute, total abomination," VanDerzee said. "It's a knee-jerk reaction by people who are afraid to tell people in their own district to make cuts. They're hiding behind the NYSPHSAA."

Solutions for increasing revenue or cutting costs elsewhere are varied. Baseball and softball teams, which typically begin play at 4 p.m. on weekday afternoons, find it hardly worth their while to collect admissions to games that are weakly attended because many parents are still at work. Spring sports fields also lack the controlled access of a basketball court or a fenced-in football field with one entry point.

School districts in heavily-populated areas could modify their non-league schedule to cut down on travel costs, but teams from rural areas will always have long distances to drive.

"The softball coaches considered playing each other once in the league and using the non-league games to play teams that were five to ten minutes away," said John Cipperly, coach of the girls soccer and softball teams at Lansingburgh High School. "But that might not work out so well for teams like Cobleskill. There aren't very many local teams to play Cobleskill and it wouldn't be a big impact for them."

VanDerzee staunchly believes - and with the hundreds of supportive emails he has received, clearly others do too - that if a district wants to decrease the number of games played to save money, it should be on their terms and not mandated by the NYSPHSAA.

Student-athletes, of course, are the biggest victims of the NYSPHSAA's rash vote this weekend, especially those who will not go on to play in college or spend their summers playing on travel teams or wowing scouts in AAU tournaments.

"Some coaches use early season non-league games to test out JV players and see which ones can play at the varsity level," said Al Roy, the Section II baseball Coordinator. "Late in the season, maybe the coach will reward a player that comes to practice every day, someone who doesn't get a lot of playing time. Without the extra games, those types of kids won't get the same opportunities."

