



Mahomet-Seymour fall sport coaches proceed with caution in Phase I of Return to Play



Fred Kroner  • June 15, 2020

 1  5 minutes read



By FRED KRONER

fred@mahometnews.com

It's not business as usual, but it is nonetheless back to business for Mahomet-Seymour athletes.

The M-S district – along with others who are members of the Illinois High School Association – are entering Week 2 of a plan to get students who

are involved with [sports to be active again](#).

The layoff started in mid-March when COVID-19 forced shutdowns nationwide in all phases of life.

In Illinois, coaches now have the option of implementing individual or small group workouts geared toward conditioning and strength training.

Several fall-sport coaches at M-S are emphasizing a low-key approach to the return.

[Boys' cross-country](#) coach [Neal Garrison](#) is taking a total hands-off approach.

"I don't plan to do any required practices this summer," Garrison said. "I don't plan to show up to any summer running with my team this summer.

"I find that the best runners I have had over the years are self-disciplined. I have found that when I show up to summer running, it makes it seem like practice and makes the season seem like it is months longer.

"I also do not want runners to feel any pressure to show up to an optional summer run during a pandemic."

Garrison remains concerned about the possible long-term ramifications of getting back together.

"My main concern for this summer and fall is that the runners and their families stay healthy," Garrison said. "I would rather finish last in every meet this fall than have one of my runners or their family members get seriously sick or die from this virus."

Second-year [Bulldog volleyball](#) coach [Stan Bergman](#) is also operating on the cautious side.

"I am taking the approach of safety first, paying attention to what the state is allowing and what IHSA is allowing us to do following our district guidelines," Bergman said. "I have decided to use Phase 1 as a way for the players to condition on their own.

"Lindsay Hewitt and I are putting together a suggested conditioning program through summer, but it is not mandatory.

"We have put together videos and Lindsay made a daily schedule. We are not in groups, and participation is an individual choice."

[Mahomet-Seymour boys' soccer](#) coach [Jeremy Davis](#) is promoting student-led workouts for athletes who have been idled from organized practices for more than 80 days.

"I am somewhat hands-off," Davis said. "I've got the boys into small groups for off-season conditioning. They are organized roughly by positions, with seniors organizing each group.

"We are limited to strength, conditioning and agility workouts right now."

The soccer program has static groups ranging between eight and 10. They meet two or three times a week. What they do is based on the position they play.

"Forwards and center backs need to be great sprinters," Davis said.

"Center mids, wings and fullbacks need to all have excellent endurance to get up and down the field.

"Strength is important for everyone to reduce injury risk, so all will be doing some body weight resistance exercise. Finally, the goalies need to have great agility, so they'd focus more in that regard."

Each of the M-S coaches are trying to remain optimistic that they are gearing up for what will be a season, though nothing has been confirmed

about a possible timeline.

"If cases rebound, then I do not think we will (resume)," Bergman said. "If cases maintain the decline that it is right now, I think we will have a season, but with restrictions.

"I can see high schools needing to allow only teams and officials in the gym to play, and leave it up to individual schools to provide broadcasting of the event. Or limit the number of fans. Face masks for players might not be required, but possibly for all others in the gym."

There is still much work to be done before games become a reality. The restart may be pushed later.

"Competition may not start until Sept. 1 if Illinois is moved into Phase 5 by then," Bergman said. "There are lots of scenarios, but I feel very confident that we will have a season."

Likewise, Garrison expects to see a resumption of competition.

"I do believe we will have a state series in the fall," Garrison said. "I imagine that we might have to make some modifications to the start of the season and early meets, or may even have to cancel some meets."

Davis is not getting his hopes too high.

"Missing the girls' soccer season (in the spring) was really hard for all of us, and I guess I am trying to mentally fortify myself against missing out on that time with the boys," he said.

Davis said as he looks ahead, he is focused on safety first.

"My biggest concern is that I am making sure we are doing enough to prepare for the fall, while not risking the health of the players, families and the community," Davis said.

He wants to avoid doing too much too soon.

"Kids will go from nothing to everything," Davis said. "The kids – and parents – don't understand why we still need to be taking precautions to avoid a second wave of COVID, that could possibly stop our season before it ever occurs."

Despite months of inactivity, Bergman believes it is possible for his volleyballers to be set to play by late August.

"It will depend on what we are allowed to do," Bergman said. "If we can start using equipment by July 1, then I think we should have a very competitive team and our success will depend on how well we can come together as a team.

"If we have to wait until Aug. 1, then it will be hard to get to a high level. My outlook will depend on when we can start using equipment. This season could favor teams that did not lose a lot of players from the previous year as those that did need more time to develop."

M-S soccer could find itself in a promising position.

"We were pretty young last year and still broke the school record for wins," Davis said. "We had some standout seniors who will be difficult to replace, but I think we have some stellar individuals and a lot of really good pieces around them."

The key, Davis said, will be the work ethic displayed by athletes during the next two months.

"Individual discipline," he said. "It's easy to do things you don't want to do when another person is cheering you on. It is really hard to do that when no one is watching.

"If we ever want to move beyond good, the boys will need to find that

discipline to do the little things when no one else is watching."

Garrison cautions that even working hard is not a guarantee for success.

"We have a lot of runners who seem to be working harder than they have in the past," Garrison said. "There are no guarantees that our team will be better, but their early work ethic is encouraging."

His goal remains having his runners ready to hit their peak by season's end.

"I am not that concerned about my runners being ready in August and September for races," Garrison said. "I would like to have them mentally and physically ready to race in mid-October to early November."

The cross-country coach has other issues as he looks ahead to a revamped postseason format in his sport.

"At the same time, I am a little concerned about how the IHSA is restructuring the state series," he said. "The regional and sectional meets should be more difficult to get out of. Our regional and sectional have always been some of the tougher ones to get out of."

"I think we will likely have more strong teams in our regional and sectional than we ever have had. There is a chance that even with our runners working harder, that we could get eliminated from advancing to sectional or state this year."

"Since we can't control how well other teams do, our runners will just have to really work harder than they ever have in the next four months."

Bergman wonders if schools might think outside the box as they settle on plans to return to classroom learning.


"Another thought would be if school districts decided to start school

earlier to get out earlier," Bergman said. "Example, start Aug. 3 and have finals the week after Thanksgiving break.

"Then take six to eight weeks off for winter break and resume school the last week of January, skip spring break and go into June a week or two.

"That would definitely be interesting. This skips a big part of flu season."

All options will remain speculation until Gov. J.B. Pritzker gives the green light for gatherings in groups larger than are currently allowed.

 Tags Jeremy Davis Mahomet-Seymour Cross Country Mahomet-Seymour Soccer
Mahomet-Seymour Sports Mahomet-Seymour Volleyball Neal Garrison
Stan Bergman

One Comment

Pingback: Stage 2 of Return to Play awaiting IDPH approval - Mahomet Daily-