

Football coaches irked by new IHSAA rules

Written by Jim Ecker

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Several Metro football coaches are troubled by new IHSAA rules that will limit the amount of practice time for their teams this season.

The IHSAA has banned two-a-day practices during preseason drills in August, citing player safety in typically hot conditions. In addition, teams may not engage in full contact drills until the sixth day of preseason practice and cannot hold full contact scrimmages until after the 10th practice.

Total practice time may not exceed three hours of physical activity per day. The IHSAA adopted these measures on March 8.

"I am not in favor of the new rule," Marion High School Coach Tony Perkins told the Metro Sports Report. "It seems like a knee-jerk reaction to a problem the rulesmakers perceive as a problem, (but) we as coaches do not see.

"Iowa coaches have done an outstanding job of monitoring our athletes, keeping them safe and healthy," said Perkins. "I feel this will put a lot of teams into early games not as prepared as we should be for competition.

"I would have liked to be able to vote on the change."

Kennedy Coach Tim Lewis also dislikes the new regulations.

"The worst part about it is that now kids won't get to experience the grind of two-a-days," he said. "Those are the kind of things you sit around and talk with your buddies about once your playing career is over."

Lewis acknowledged that two-a-day workouts can be demanding, but thinks they are

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worthwhile.

"They suck. No other way to put it," he said. "Up early, oftentimes before the sun comes out, practicing for a couple hours, then home, eat a little bit, rest a little bit, then back to the school and at it again.

"Home late, grab a bite to eat, off to bed and then hit it again early the next morning for five straight days. You really found out a lot about yourself in those situations.

"Now that's gone and it's sad," said Lewis. "Kids today have a hard enough time finding things that develop mental toughness. Now they just lost another one.

"I think if you were to ask most coaches about their two-a-day schedule, you would find that very few coaches probably practice much longer than two hours a session. Now we are allowed one practice for three hours, and I would say that most coaches will use the entire three hours.

"So, did we really gain anything from a safety perspective?"

Cedar Valley Christian Coach Ed Betsworth said the ban on two-a-days will not affect his program, because the Huskies practice only once per day during the preseason.

"But what concerns me is the time limit on when you can start contact," he said. "You have to have full contact amongst players to properly teach blocking and tackling. You can only do so much against dummies.

"I know the IHSA is trying to protect players, but I think this legislation is going too far," said Betsworth. "The sooner you can start contact the better. Players need to get used to the hitting.

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"Athletes at this level need that extra full contact time to properly learn the techniques of tackling and blocking. Otherwise we are setting up our athletes for the possibility of having other serious injuries.

"And seriously ... Only four days of full contact scrimmaging before the first game?"

Cedar Rapids Prairie Coach Mike Morrissey said the new rules will have a minimal impact on his program.

"We used two-a-days before as one practice in the morning and a walkthrough/film session in the afternoon," he said. "The three-hour limit on practice doesn't change anything we did in the fall, either.

"We were done with practice each day within 2 hours and 15 minutes. We really tried to stress tempo at practice and to get the guys from drill to drill quickly. Luckily for us, it won't change much from what we already do."

Jefferson Coach Brian Webb has elected to accept the new rules and move forward.

"Whatever rules and procedure are - or will be - set forth, we will follow them as directed," he replied. "Whether we agree or disagree with them is irrelevant."

"We'll do whatever they tell us to do," agreed Kennedy Coach Lewis. "Improvise and adjust. Adapt and overcome."

Betsworth hope the rules will be amended in the future.

"After the season is over, I hope the IHSAA will come to us and ask how it went and get our

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opinions and input when all is said and done," he said. "And in the future, check with us before they make these type of changes."