

WSSAAA Newsletter May 2020



Everett Memorial



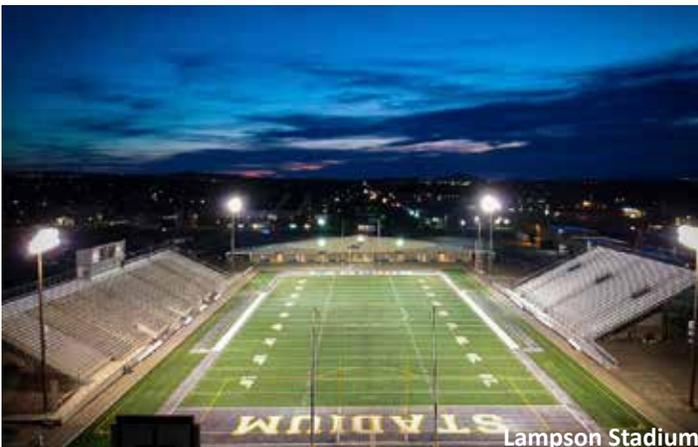
Stadium HS



Prairie HS



Sparks Stadium



Lampson Stadium



Orting HS



Centralia HS



Emerald Ridge HS



Lake Stevens HS



Woodland HS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE 3	A LITTLE PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD OF SPORTS TODAY
PAGE 5	FINDING JOY IN THE JOB WHILE GETTING KICKED IN THE TEETH
PAGE 6	HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE FUN MOMENTS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS
PAGE 7	ATHLETIC DIRECTORS OF THE YEAR
PAGE 9	FOOTBALL COACH COMMUNICATES DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES
PAGE 10	TAKE A LOAD OFF: 52 PROVEN STRESS RELIEVERS
PAGE 12	NIAAA SUMMER WEBINARS
PAGE 13	7 THINGS YOU ONLINE FORMS PROVIDER MUST DO
PAGE 16	DEALING WITH THE LOSS OF A SEASON

Due to the COVID-19 closures, All-American Publishing was not able to produce the May 2020 WSSAAA Newsletter.

Joe Keller compiled the articles and materials. Jim Meyerhoff produced the newsletter.



Washington Secondary School Athletic Administrators Association
www.WSSAAA.com

A little perspective on the world of sports today

by: Chris Egan, King5 Sports



We truly are in the midst of uncharted waters, especially for those of us that cover sports for a living. The stadiums are empty, and the ball fields are bare. Nascar, golf, the NBA, hockey and soccer are all postponed. No pro sports, no college sports and no youth sports for now.

So, what do we do with our time? Last night was one of the first Friday nights in over a decade where I wasn't coaching, watching a game, taking a kid to practice or reporting from a game. I decided to simply sit down and have dinner with my wife and kids, my parents and my in-laws. We ate, we laughed, we played games and we talked for 6 straight hours. It was a very good night.

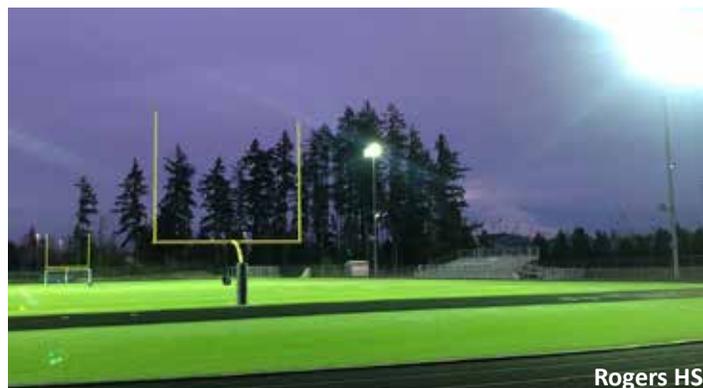
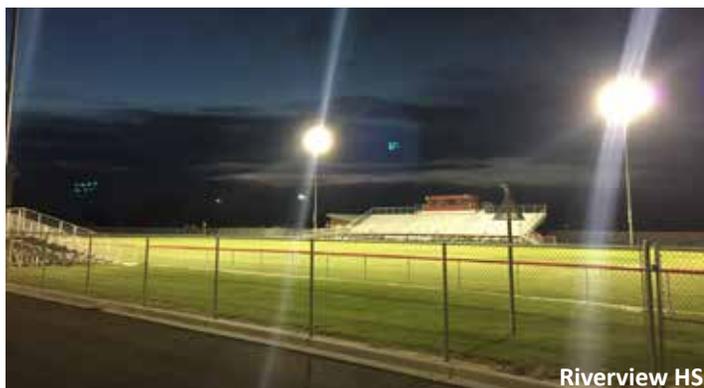
For once in my life I've been given the gift of time and I don't plan to waste it. While many of us search for things to do, I'm going to play catch more, shoot some hoops, go hiking and biking, read some books and hang out with my kids. They'll be home for six weeks and instead of being bitter that there's no school or youth sports, I'm going to make the most of it.

My hope is sooner than later sports will be back for all of us to enjoy. I'm hopeful the seniors in high school will have a chance to finish strong. I'm hopeful it won't be long before we're all watching the Sounders,

the Mariners and the Storm and gearing up for the Summer Olympics. But my hope is also that we come back with a better appreciation for sports and what they mean to us. My hope is that maybe we don't yell and scream so much at the refs and umps for trying to do their jobs. Maybe we don't yell at our own kids for striking out or missing a lay-in. Maybe we don't talk behind our coaches back when he or she doesn't start our kids.

Maybe we simply appreciate sports and the moments. Maybe we say, "it's a joy to watch you play," "thanks for officiating or game," and "thanks for coaching my kid". Maybe we don't leave T-Mobile park in a bad mood because the Mariners lost and rather, we savor the moment of watching the great game of baseball in a beautiful city. Maybe we don't curse at our TV when Russell Wilson throws a pick or lose our minds when Stefan Frei gives up a goal. Maybe we simply appreciate sports, our kids, our coaches, our umpires and our teams just a little bit more and enjoy all the moments. I know I will. It's very hard right now, I get it. I'm coach, a dad of three athletes, including one that does a spring sports at Washington State and a sportscaster in one of the best sports cities in the World. Stay positive! Sports we'll be back, we'll get thru this together and hopefully we'll enjoy sports even more when it does return.

Thank you.
Chris Egan, King 5 Sports
Twitter: @ChrisEgan5



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Finding Joy in the Job while getting Kicked in the Teeth

by: Brett A. Stauffer, Topennish HS Athletic Director



There are few jobs in education where the position puts you on an “island”. Being an athletic director is definitely one of those jobs. It really is a “lone wolf” profession. No one knows the hours and effort that are put in on a daily, weekly and yearly basis except for athletic

directors and their significant others. I always smile when people ask me “what do you do all day?”, the implication being that we just sit around and collect a paycheck. In my younger days I tried to answer the question, but never knew where to start. Now I just respond by shrugging my shoulders. It is pointless to explain the many things we do because people will either not believe you or not understand.

If you are the type of individual that needs external praise about the great job you are doing, then being an athletic director is really not for you. Your praise and job satisfaction need to be intrinsic, knowing for yourself the things you are accomplishing. It is a thankless job. People rarely call you to tell you what a great job you are doing. In fact, most calls are usually negative in nature, individuals calling to complain about a coach or an official or an athlete, etc. At times, the amount of negativity can be overwhelming.

The athletic director is the 3rd most visible position in the majority of school districts, right behind the superintendent and the high school principal. This position comes with responsibilities that are too numerous to list and ever changing. If one thing gets by you and falls through the cracks, everyone takes notice. You frequently have to accept responsibility for problems that you did not create but must deal with the aftermath. Is it any wonder that there is a high burnout rate among athletic directors?

So why do it?

Why would any sane, rational person want to be an athletic director? Perhaps that’s the answer. Most athletic directors may be a bit unhinged. While I cannot speak for all athletic directors, there are several aspects of this job that bring me great joy and satisfaction.

Most important is the opportunity we have to make a difference. Through developing coaches and programs we can create a positive environment in our communities, especially in smaller towns. Getting community members involved, seeing them at our games and supporting our student athletes is very satisfying. Watching communities come together as a team competes at districts, regionals or state is always amazing.

As athletic directors, we have a huge impact on the culture of our schools. As we work hard to develop successful programs, it is enjoyable to watch students and teachers rally behind the athletes and teams. It brings people together in ways that only athletics can. We create positive environments.

We absolutely make a difference in the lives of our students. Research shows that students who participate in sports get better grades, don’t have attendance issues, are more likely to stay away from drugs and alcohol, go on to college and become productive citizens. Athletic directors create opportunities for growth. It brings me joy to watch our students compete. Competition is always exciting and both the highs and the lows bring valuable lessons.

As athletic directors, we face many challenges. However, watching students graduate year after year, knowing that our efforts have made them better individuals who are more prepared for life, should bring us all great pride and satisfaction.

WSSAAA Hall of Fame Inductee Joe Keller, West Central District Secretary



Fun Moments With Family and Friends by: Dave Tikker, WSSAAA Executive Director



Last night we had a game night with some friends of ours and by the time the night was over we had laughed, and laughed some more, and for a brief few hours the weight of the world was off all of our shoulders. I have to tell you, it felt great. We had so much fun we agreed to continue to do this and possibly add a few more couples.

I share this with you because we all get so caught up in our respective lives and the stressful moments that just seem to keep coming. It's hard to unwind at times, through those unconditional fun moments, but so necessary to do so in order to keep our priorities straight.

Taking time in your busy schedules to have some fun with family and friends goes a long way in preserving your capacity to carry those physical and emotional workloads.

Here are a few suggestions to think about for changing things up.

Bike ride, hike, music concert, Broadway or local play, game night, movie night, bowling, lecture series, family picnic, reading a good book, revisiting an old nostalgic tv show that you watched as a kid, tennis, pickle ball, racquetball, swimming, bingo, golf or miniature golf. Watching an old music concert on TV. Call a friend you haven't spoken to in awhile. Send an "I appreciate you" note to a good friend. Do something to put a smile on your face and repeat.

Enjoy the moment, you're worth it!

WSSAAA AD of the Year Honorees



District 1
Scott Sifferman
Sultan HS & MS



District 2
Lance Gatter
Inglemoor HS



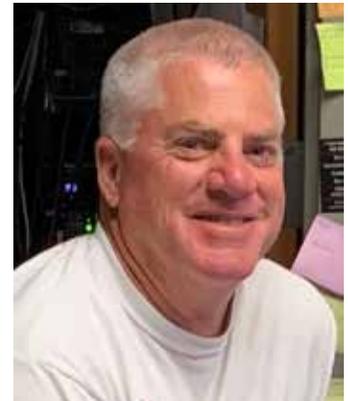
District 3
Mark Swofford
North Mason HS



District 4
Rory Oster
Camas School District



District 5
Lance Den Boer
Kiona-Benton HS



District 6
Greg Austin
Brewster HS



District 7
Chris Snyder
Deer Park HS



District 8
Casey Gant
Kamiakin HS



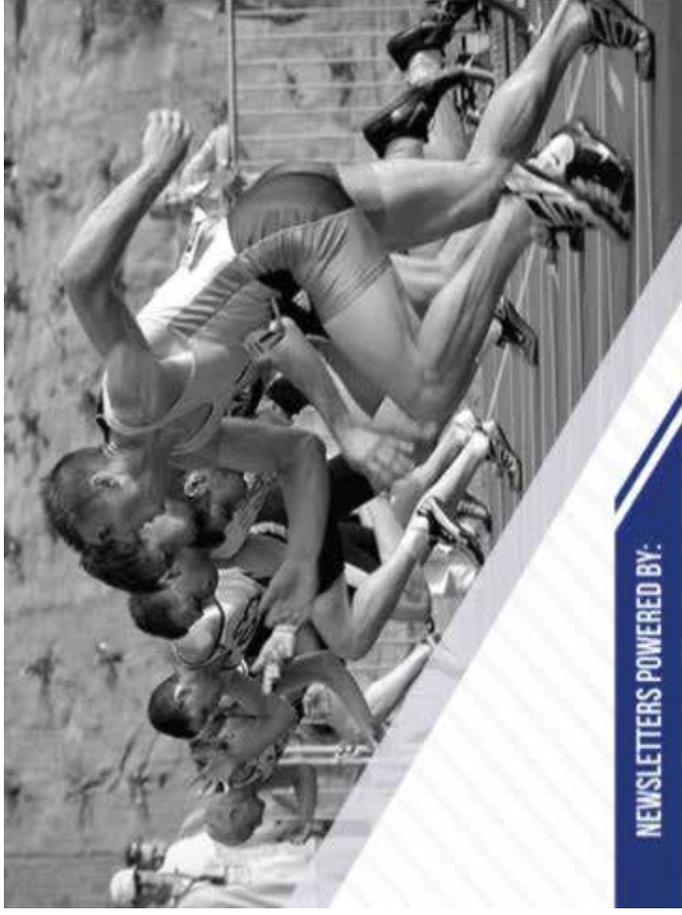
District 9
Ken Lindgren
Oaksdale



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Football Coach Communicates During School Closure

by: Trevor Hanson, Franklin Pierce HS

PLAYERS,

It has been an unprecedented last few days with the announcement of mandated limited gatherings, social distancing and school closures in response to the coronavirus pandemic. On Thursday, we had just completed a great week of **Cardinal Crew** morning workouts when Gov. Inslee announced **school will be closed through Monday, April 27th** and possibly longer. This will obviously impact an incredible amount of people in so many ways - including yourselves and your families.

I want to encourage each of you as you are at head home for the next **44** days. Our 2020 program theme is **'Find A Way'**, and I think it applies greatly to this moment. In a time where you could choose be disengaged and withdraw from productivity and focus - instead I ask you find a way to be **resilient**. Stay **committed** to growth and **disciplined** to take advantage of this unique opportunity. I'll say that again - don't let this be a break, make it an opportunity. Successful people find ways to leverage any and all **events**, through appropriate **responses**, to produces desired **outcomes**.

So 'Find A Way' to:

Be helpful. Help around the house as much as you can; cooking, cleaning, taking care of your siblings, whatever is needed. You should be **adding value** to your household by being home everyday. Be **sacrificial** and **serve** your family.

Get caught up in your classes. Your academic clock has paused - use it to your advantage. You have over a month to study for that test or complete those missing assignments. **There is absolutely no reason you should have any missing assignments when you return to school.** None. Take care of your work first before picking up the Xbox/PS4/TV remote.

Stay in shape. I know not all of you have weights at home - but you don't want to lose the strength and endurance you've built in the weight room over the past few months. **I will be putting together a home workout program over the next few days that involves a lot of body weight and core lifts.** Take advantage of this resource. You won't have the **accountability** of your coaches or your peers so you have to **lead yourself** in this.

Refresh. Find a healthy way to bring **joy** and **fun** into your life during this time. It's important to stay on task and focused but it's also important to counterbalance that with things that bring you life. Connect with your **friends** and do what you can to **encourage** your **teammates**.

Lastly, continue to track updates on **fpschools.org** and if **ANY** of you need **ANYTHING**, feel free to reach out. If you or your family find yourself in need of food, or assistance, your coaches are here for you. Blessings.

-COACH HANSON

#FindAWay



Take a Load Off: 52 Proven Stress Reducers

by: Dave Tikker, WSSAAA Executive Director

1. Prepare for the morning the evening before. Set the breakfast table, make lunches, put out the clothes you plan to wear, etc.
2. Don't rely on your memory. Write down appointment times, when to pick up the laundry, when library books are due, etc. ("The palest ink is better than the most retentive memory." - Old Chinese Proverb)
3. Do nothing which, after being done, leads you to tell a lie.
4. Make duplicates of all keys. Bury a house key in a secret spot in the garden and carry a duplicate car key in your wallet, apart from your key ring.
5. Practice preventive maintenance. Your car, appliances, home, and relationships will be less likely to break down/fall apart "at the worst possible moment."
6. Be prepared to wait. A paperback can make a wait in a post office line almost pleasant.
7. Procrastination is stressful. Whatever you want to do tomorrow, do today; whatever you want to do today, do it now.
8. Plan ahead. Don't let the gas tank get below one-quarter full; keep a well-stocked "emergency shelf" of home staples; don't wait until you're down to your last bus token or postage stamp to buy more; etc.
9. Don't put up with something that doesn't work right. If your alarm clock, wallet, shoe laces, windshield wipers or Whatever? are a constant aggravation, get them fixed or get new ones.
10. Allow 15 minutes of extra time to get to appointments. Plan to arrive at an airport one hour before domestic departures.
11. Eliminate (or restrict) the amount of caffeine in your diet.
12. Always set up contingency plans, "just in case." ("If for some reason either of us is delayed, here?" what we'll do?" kind of thing. Or, "If we get split up in the shopping center, here's where we'll meet.")
13. Relax your standards. The world will not end if the grass doesn't get mowed this weekend.
14. Pollyanna-Power! For every one thing that goes wrong, there are probably 10 or 50 or 100 blessings. Count em!
15. Ask questions. Taking a few moments to repeat back directions, what someone expects of you, etc., can save hours. (The old "the hurried I go, the behinder I get, " idea.)
16. Say "No!" Saying "no" to extra projects, social activities, and invitations you know you don't have the time or energy for takes practice, self-respect, and a belief that everyone, every day, needs quiet time to relax and be alone.
17. Unplug your phone. Want to take a long bath, meditate, sleep, or read without interruption? Drum up the courage to temporarily disconnect. (The possibility of there being a terrible emergency in the next hour or so is almost nil.) Or use an answering machine.
18. Turn "needs" into preferences. Our basic physical needs translate into food, water, and keeping warm. Everything else is a preference. Don't get attached to preferences.
19. Simplify, simplify, simplify?
20. Make friends with non-worriers. Nothing can get you into the habit of worrying faster than associating with chronic worrywarts.
21. Get up and stretch periodically if your job requires that you sit for extended periods.
22. Wear earplugs. If you need to find quiet at home, pop in some earplugs.
23. Get enough sleep. If necessary, use an alarm clock to remind you to go to bed.
24. Create order out of chaos. Organize your home and workspace so that you always know exactly where things are. Put things away where they belong and you won't have to go through the stress of losing things.
25. When feeling stressed, most people tend to breathe in short, shallow breaths. When you breathe like this, stale air is not expelled, oxidation of the tissues is incomplete, and muscle tension frequently results. Check your breathing throughout the day, and before, during, and after high-pressure situations. If you find your stomach muscles are knotted and your breathing is shallow, relax all your muscles and take several deep, slow breaths. Note how, when you're

relaxed, both your abdomen and chest expand when you breathe.

26. Writing your thoughts and feelings down (in a journal, or on paper to be thrown away) can help you clarify things and can give you a renewed perspective.

27. Try the following yoga technique whenever you feel the need to relax. Inhale deeply through your nose to the count of eight. Then, with lips puckered, exhale very slowly through your mouth to the count of 16, or for as long as you can. Concentrate on the long sighing sound and feel the tension dissolve. Repeat 10 times.

28. Inoculate yourself against a feared event. Example: before speaking in public, take time to go over every part of the experience in your mind. Imagine what you'll wear, what the audience will look like, how you will present your talk, what the questions will be and how you will answer them, etc. Visualize the experience the way you would have it be. You'll likely find that when the time comes to make the actual presentation, it will be "old hat" and much of your anxiety will have fled.

29. When the stress of having to get a job done gets in the way of getting the job done, diversion? a voluntary change in activity and/or environment may be just what you need.

30. Talk it out. Discussing your problems with a trusted friend can help clear your mind of confusion so you can concentrate on problem solving.

31. One of the most obvious ways to avoid unnecessary stress is to select an environment (work, home, leisure) which is in line with your personal needs and desires. If you hate desk jobs, don't accept a job which requires that you sit at a desk all day. If you hate to talk politics, don't associate with people who love to talk politics, etc.

32. Learn to live one day at a time.

33. Every day, do something you really enjoy.

34. Add an ounce of love to everything you do.

35. Take a hot bath or shower (or a cool one in summertime) to relieve tension.

36. Do something for somebody else.

37. Focus on understanding rather than on being understood; on loving rather than on being loved.

38. Do something that will improve your appearance. Looking better can help you feel better.

39. Schedule a realistic day. Avoid the tendency to schedule back-to-back appointments; allow time between appointments for a breathing spell.

40. Become more flexible. Some things are worth not doing perfectly and some issues are well to compromise upon.

41. Eliminate destructive self-talk: "I'm too old to?," "I'm too fat to?," etc.

42. Use your weekend time for a change of pace. If your work week is slow and patterned, make sure there is action and time for spontaneity built into your weekends. If your work week is fast-paced and full of people and deadlines, seek peace and solitude during your days off. Feel as if you aren't accomplishing anything at work? Tackle a job on the weekend which you can finish to your satisfaction.

43. "Worry about the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves." That's another way of saying: take care of the today's as best you can and the yesterdays and the tomorrows will take care of themselves.

44. Do one thing at a time. When you are with someone, be with that person and with no one or nothing else. When you are busy with a project, concentrate on doing that project and forget about everything else you have to do.

45. Allow yourself time every day for privacy, quiet, and introspection.

46. If an especially unpleasant task faces you, do it early in the day and get it over with; then the rest of your day will be free of anxiety.

47. Learn to delegate responsibility to capable others.

48. Don't forget to take a lunch break. Try to get away from your desk or work area in body and mind, even if it's just for 15 or 20 minutes.

49. Forget about counting to 10. Count to 1,000 before doing something or saying anything that could make matters worse.

50. Have a forgiving view of events and people. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world.

51. Have an optimistic view of the world. Believe that most people are doing the best they can.

52. Get up fifteen minutes earlier in the morning. The inevitable morning mishaps will be less stressful

NIAAA 2020 Summer Webinar Schedule

These dates are subject to change. All courses begin at 7:30 p.m. EST.
Register on NIAAA Professional Development website

626 – Mon. July 6 & 13	Effects of Alcohol, Chemicals and Nutrition on Body and Performance
633 – Mon. July 6 & 13	Administrations of Interscholastic Athletic Programs for Students with Disabilities
611 – Tue. July 7 & 14	Concepts/Strategies for Interscholastic Marketing, Promotions and Fund-Raising
715 - Tue. July 7 & 14	Appropriate Professional Boundaries: Identifying, Implementing and Maintaining
700 – Wed. July 8 & 15	Administration of Middle School Athletic Programs
630 – Thu. July 9 & 16	Interscholastic Contest Management – Planning, Preparation and Methods
501* – Tue. July 21 & 28	Guiding Foundations and Philosophies
510* – Wed. July 22 & 29	Legal Issues IV (Social Media, Transgender Participation, Event Management & Security, Pregnant & Parenting Student-Athletes, & Intellectual Property)
503* – Thur. July 23 & 30	Enhancing Organization Management
502* – Mon. July 27 & Aug 3	Strategies for Organization Management

*Available as an online course

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7 Things Your Online School Forms Provider MUST Do

by: Clay Burnett, Final Forms



Partnering with the right online school forms provider can transform your district, bringing more efficiency to your processes while making it easier to achieve 100 percent form compliance and reduce liabilities.

Traditionally, districts have relied on paper-based systems to handle forms. However, this outdated approach created a number of inefficiencies as papers were misplaced and staff needed to spend countless hours entering relevant information by hand. At the same time, printing an endless amount of paper created a lot of waste, driving costs up at the same time. Beyond that, paper-based systems made it difficult to track down the right information the moment you needed it.

Add it all up, and this approach led to decreased compliance and increased liabilities, while putting a damper on student safety.

Online School Forms: The Better Way Forward

In recent years, online forms have changed the game altogether. Thanks to their digital nature, online forms bring more efficiency to the form distribution and collection process—saving districts countless hours while reducing costs considerably. With more time on their hands, IT and staff productivity increases, enabling these workers to focus on more important tasks instead of the minutiae.

Online systems also make it much easier to determine whether students are eligible for athletics, have permission to participate in field trips or clubs, and have turned in their emergency contact and medical information, among other things. These features enable

districts to reduce liability and risk, while improving safety and increasing compliance.

Altogether, this translates into improved student, parent, staff, and coach experiences—which strengthens the entire academic ecosystem.

What to Look for in an Online School Forms Provider

Unfortunately, once you've decided to move to online forms, you can't just pick any provider and expect great results. You have to do your due diligence to make sure you pick the solution that delivers the most benefits to your district.

As you begin your search for the best online school forms provider for your needs, here are seven things to look for.

1. Versatile tools that deliver lots of benefits for students, athletes, parents, and staff

The last thing you want to do is invest in a new platform and change all of your processes only to find out that the tool doesn't give you all the functionality you need.

Look for a powerful and flexible tool that packs a big punch, delivering strong out-of-the-box features for students, athletes, parents, and staff. Leading solutions will also enable you to extend your investments by integrating with other systems your district relies on every day.

2. Strong data security

In the digital age, privacy is becoming more important than ever before. Because of this, you should look for a solution that protects sensitive data. The right provider will use industry-leading security features and standards, and they won't sell student data to third parties.

At the same time, the right system will ensure that authorized individuals are able to access the information they need at the moment they need it.

3. Built for schools by people who understand schools

All too often in the tech world, solutions emerge that—although designed by talented engineers—don't support the specific industry's workflows because those engineers lack the perspective needed to know what the perfect solution should look like.

There's a simple fix to this problem: Look for solutions that were designed by people who understand schools and high school sports. FinalForms CEO Clay Burnett, for example, uses FinalForms every day as a coach!

4. Leading support

We all know what it's like to buy something only to find out that the company that sold it to us doesn't offer post-sale support. Your online school forms solution is a critical part of your district's operations. You need to look for a provider that offers 24/7/365 support.

At FinalForms, we pride ourselves on our top-notch support, a key differentiator. Our average response time is 2.5 hours, and we often respond in a few minutes.

5. Training services

The right provider will be committed to your district's success to the point that they will offer in-person and online training services to make sure your users get up to speed on the platform quickly.

6. A tool that's easy and intuitive

Support and training are nice, but you need a solution that's easy and intuitive so that users can become immediately productive on the platform.

Look for a solution that allows you to upload forms and update information instantly. Also keep in mind that 60 percent of parents complete online school forms on mobile devices. Leading platforms will have a seamless mobile experience and make it incredibly easy to see where compliance stands at any point in time and—thanks to features like one-click equipment assignment and collection—they simplify the asset tracking process.

7. Positive customer reviews

When shopping for an online school forms provider, you don't have to go entirely on your own. Do some research to see what other districts are using the platform in question—and what they're saying about it.

FinalForms: Your Go-To Online School Forms Provider

With best-in-class security, robust training and support services, and more, FinalForms is a feature-filled online school forms solution built for schools by the people who understand them.

Once you see the product in action, you'll wonder how your district got by without it.

Schedule a demo today to learn more about how FinalForms can bring efficiency and convenience to your district's form distribution and collection processes. We look forward to hearing from you!



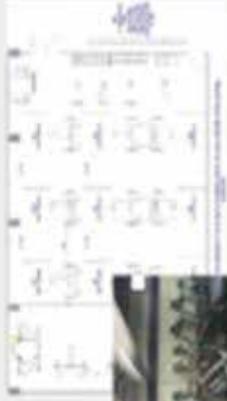
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Dealing With the Loss of a Season

by: Derek Falor, Certified Sport Psychology Consultant at Thrive



If you are reading this post, there's a very strong chance that you are an athlete, or parent of an athlete, like thousands of others across the world, who have just had your season cancelled, seriously altered, or postponed by the growing coronavirus pandemic.

As a certified mental performance consultant of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology, my heart is very heavy for every athlete who's season just went dark. For 27 years I have worked in college athletics as either a coach or mental performance consultant, and yesterday's season cancelling news was one of the hardest days I have experienced, as seen through the eyes of the athletes with whom I am working. I am on staff with a highly ranked NCAA D1 Women's Gymnastics Team and Thursday was just gut wrenching as we sat in a circle informing our athletes that our conference, and the NCAA, had just cancelled our season, our championships.

There are athletes on our team who are ranked in the top ten in the country, have scored perfect 10's this season, and have been giving their all to help our team excel for 4+ years. For a couple days we thought we would compete in empty arenas only in front of our families. That seemed hard, but we knew we could handle that challenge. Losing out on the whole championship portion of a season is not just a challenge, it's a huge blow that is indescribable. Thousands of amazing athletes will now not have a chance to show off a few more times all they've accomplished through dedicated work over 10+ years. There are seniors who will miss out on Senior Day, elite athletes who lose the chance to compete in a few last meets and put a bow on their athletic careers. I've never felt at such a loss for words to help an athlete. It's a uniquely heartbreaking development for those

who don't understand the structure of an athletic season; the buildup, the sacrifice, the delaying of gratification, the investment of months we spent working to hone abilities to be our best. Those who don't compete anymore, haven't ever competed at a high level, and those who don't care about athletics won't get it. But we do.

Functionally, this involuntary loss of the season is best viewed through the context of grief. For most of us the context of grief is that of death, but for many athletes yesterday, the loss of their careers feels a whole lot like a death. In general, athletics is not particularly literate or well equipped about grief/managing loss. We tend not to have the language/skills to effectively deal with it ourselves or help others we work with. We often rely on platitudes of 'keeping working', 'you'll be back at it in no time', 'tomorrow's a new day', etc. For many athletes this past Thursday, and for the weeks to come, feelings of confusion may reign. Empty sport platitudes won't help. The range of emotional experience is far and wide with this sudden loss of a season.

Around the world, there's going to be epic loss as a result of this virus (some temporary, some permanent) ...careers, awards, championships, hopes, dreams, lifestyles, financial stability, social circles, friends, loved ones. This is akin to dealing with a massive number of athletes who may have career ending injuries. It is rapid and involuntary. Some will rebound well, and others will have more difficulties.

Without a doubt, this is devastating to most athletes. At the very least it's incredibly confusing. What may be helpful is to consider thinking about all of this from the perspective of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance). I doubt many, if any athletes, are in denial about what is happening and are likely in one of the other stages. Ideally, in time, athletes will get to the point of acceptance. But there is no timetable for

this. They need to just to know it's okay feel whatever they are feeling near others who will listen, support, and not try to "talk them out of" how they feel about losing their seasons.

Athletes are going to feel that they've been stolen from, robbed of an opportunity. Peers will feel heart-broken for their teammates who are moving on – seniors for example. It's OK to feel this. It's natural, and it's justified. Don't let anyone tell you not to feel the pain of this loss. This cancellation means that we will all lose history in some way. History from the sport, a handful of great scores, or team results, and history from our personal narratives. History is a hard thing to lose.

I suspect athletes are going to feel like their efforts and their sport is being trivialized, weighed against someone else's life. If we are thinking from a socially responsible perspective, then I suppose this is true in many senses. None of us are placing an athletic competition above someone else's health. Just because a gymnastics meet isn't the most important thing, doesn't mean it doesn't matter a lot.

THE CORONAVIRUS CAN'T TAKE AWAY THE STRENGTH WE'VE EARNED

Athletes will eventually look back on the sacrifices they and their teammates and coaches made, the work put in over months with the hope that there would be a chance at an amazing payoff or championship; a payoff now reduced to a brief announcement about indefinite postponements and cancellations. Athletes may feel that the coronavirus has robbed them of an entire season. But it hasn't.

Sport has never been just about the destination. It's really about the process. The time spent training and pushing ourselves into uncomfortable places so we can grow and improve. Athletics often puts so much emphasis on the outcome – but 90% of sport is what you did to get there.

No one produces incredible results, achieves an All-American Award, or competes for a championship and disconnects it entirely from the season that led up to it. That big moment is the product of hundreds

of small process steps taken – days, hours, minutes of growth as an athlete, adding up to who they are at the end of the season.

What matters most is that we all learn how to grow in the process of a season and a career. It's not how you compete as much as who you are. Though you may not see the complete end product now due to the cancellations, the progress and growth earned through blood, sweat, and tears is still there.

When feeling such deep levels of disappointment, it's a normal instinct to look for someone or something to blame. In the short run, it's easier to externalize our anger, to channel our negative emotions somewhere outside our own heads, where they can't continue to loop in our minds. Don't blame your clubs or your state high school leagues. Don't blame your athletic departments. Don't blame your conference. Don't blame the NCAA. They're not trying to hurt you – they're trying to protect the people you love.

You might be willing to risk getting sick to compete. I believe most athletes would be. As a physically fit athlete in your teens or 20's, you probably feel the virus doesn't pose a significant threat to you. But the massive and sweeping responses to the coronavirus outbreak aren't there just to protect you – they're there to protect the ones especially at risk, particularly older people or those with chronic health conditions or weakened immune systems.

Seasons were canceled to protect your grandparent, who at 80 years old has a 15% chance of dying if she contracts COVID-19. The meet was canceled to protect the 60-year-old judge, who wouldn't miss the Pac 12 Championship for the world, but, as a diabetic with an increased mortality rate from COVID-19, would be risking her life to be on a crowded arena floor for you on meet day. The meet was canceled for the parent with the compromised immune system that would give up everything to see you stick that landing one more time.

The people and organizations in charge had to make gutwrenching calls to cancel seasons and they did it knowing how badly it would hurt you. They did it for the people you care most about. Don't blame them,

they made rational decisions. They didn't take away your season. Coronavirus did. This virus is the latest in a long line of things that have tried to rob you of the joy you can get from sport. Other illnesses have tried. Snow storms have canceled your meets and practices. Bar apparatuses have broken, budget cuts have threatened, injuries have flared, surfaces have been unsafe.

But sport always comes back strong. You are still going strong. Nothing else has beaten you, nothing else has taken away the things you've gained through sport. I'm telling you that everything you've earned, for all the ways that you are stronger through your involvement in sport, you are a better person. Everything you've overcome in the past has made you stronger, has made you the better, tougher, a more well-rounded person you are today. The pain you feel now is only going to make you better in the future.

One purpose of sports is to help develop life skills for the really important stuff. This is really important. Coronavirus hasn't taken sport away from us. Our tireless hours training and competing has prepared you to overcome coronavirus.

When competition eventually resumes, and it will, we're going to see athletes doing great things. We'll see a group of athletes, and people, molded and

shaped by adversity into a stronger, tougher, more resolute group than they would have been otherwise.

Coronavirus can't take away the season that you had. Only you can take that away. Feel what you need to feel now. But in the future, please give yourself permission to feel pride in all you accomplished as an athlete this year. You have done things most humans can't do. You have persevered through countless challenges most would have run from. You are strong. You are resilient. You are amazing! Be proud of the person and athlete you have become.

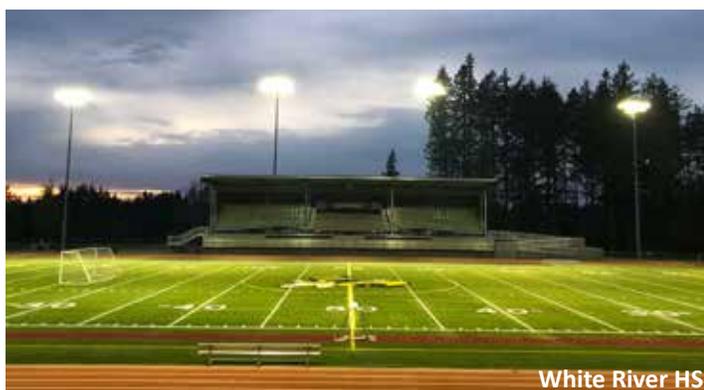
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