

Sports

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Football: GHSA delays season opener until Sept. 4

Remaining fall sports expected to begin 2020 season on time

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Thomaston - Football fans in Georgia will have to wait two more weeks for Friday night lights.

On Monday, July 20, the Georgia High School Association's Board of Trustees (BOT) voted unanimously to postpone all high school football games (including preseason scrimmages) by two weeks. Initially slated for an Aug. 21 kickoff, the 2020 football season will now get underway Sept. 4.

Practice dates are unaffected, and July 27 remains the official statewide start for football conditioning. Additionally, the GHSA does not expect to deviate from the standard 10-game, five-week playoff format.

All other fall sports will continue on their regular timetable.

The two-week football delay passed during last week's meeting after the board rejected Jesse Crews' proposal to stick with the current schedule. Glenn White followed with the accepted motion to delay the start of all football competition by two weeks.

According to Steven Craft and Jasper Jewell, the Atlanta Public School System



L-R: Union County head coach Brian Allison, freshman quarterback Caiden Tanner, coach James Avery and coach Robby Roxbury during workouts last week. Photo/Todd Forrest

could see a total cancellation of fall sports should the board refuse to amend the schedule.

However, Kevin Petroski came to the defense of rural school, pointing out a delay on the gridiron would impact

winter sports at smaller systems that depend heavily on multi-sport athletes more so than their larger counterparts.

Walton County parent, Amy Henry, also addressed the board, discussing the im-

portance of sports to high schoolers and how the benefits of playing outweigh the risks associated with COVID-19.

As of this writing, Alabama and Mississippi are the only southeastern states expect-

ing to begin the regular season in August. North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee plan to start on Sept. 4, while Florida recently delayed its opening night until late-September.

So far, Virginia is the lone southeastern state to cancel high school football outright, although the VHSL (Virginia High School League)

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Football: Summer vital for young Panthers seeking fall playing time

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

As the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) decided the fate of football season 180 miles away, the Union County Panthers took part in their first helmeted 7-on-7 drills of the summer.

And while competition against other schools is still prohibited (see full statement below), Union County's summer workout sessions are beginning to look a bit more familiar after the GHSA's approval of helmets beginning Monday, July 20.

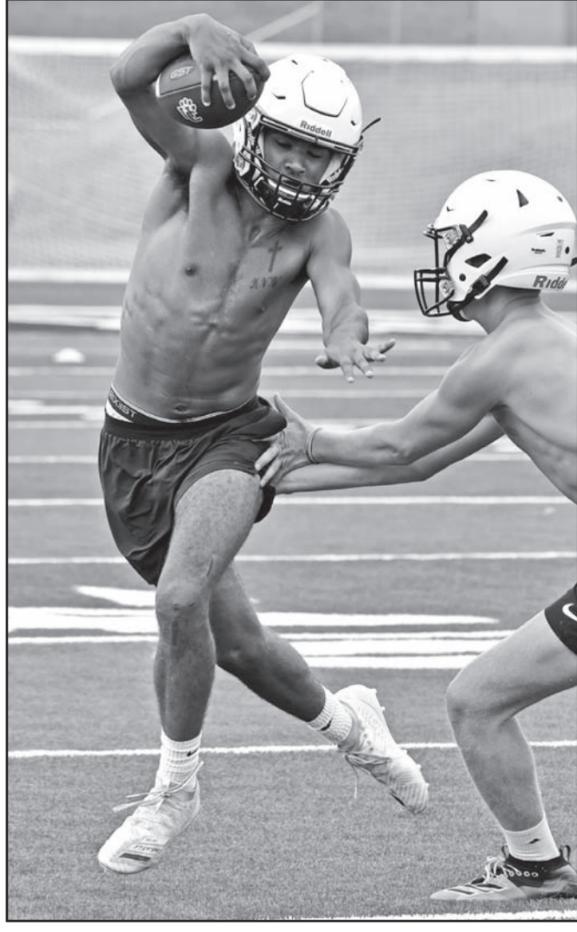
But despite the familiarity of the routine, the on-field personnel looks significantly different in 2020.

With junior Logan Helcher taking snaps at QB-1, senior Kaston Hemphill and freshman Caiden Tanner split reps with the second unit during last week's 7-on-7 action at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium. Meanwhile, heavy losses at wide receiver and defensive back resulted in three new pass catchers battling a secondary that graduated three of four starters.

However, the defensive departures should include an asterisk as speedster Carson Walker returns after missing the entire 2019 season due to injury. Walker was all but penciled in as a starting cornerback before a preseason injury cost him all 12 games.

Coming on the heels of no spring practices and limited summer workouts, the competitive juices between teammates were cranked up to 100 last week. In the meantime, coaches used the 7-on-7 session for instruction while allowing positional units to build chemistry with some much-needed reps.

There was no clear-cut advantage on either side of the



Carson Walker is hoping for a healthy 2020 following an injury-riddled sophomore campaign in 2019. Photo/Todd Forrest

ball. And while the skill positions and secondary show no substantial signs of a drop-off in the athleticism department, the lack of experience and lost practice time has resulted in visible signs of rust.

Broken coverages on defense, along with timing issues and drops in the passing game were common, despite athleticism often concealing the minor mental lapses.

Following the finesse portion of practice, physicality was front and center as the offensive lineman took the field. Much like the receivers,

the Panthers O-line graduated three starters from 2019, along with Emory and Henry signee Wright Hogsed, who suffered a season-ending ACL tear in September.

Last month, Hogsed spoke with the *North Georgia News* and discussed the importance of Union County's front-five this fall.

"It's not going to be easy this year," he said. "You're going to have to put in a lot of extra work. If they want to be one of the best teams to come through Union County, which they have the potential to be,



The young crop of Union County wide receivers have showcased their pass-catching skills all summer. Photo/Todd Forrest

you must be prepared to put in the work.

"Your mindset has to be: I want this. I want it bad. As a lineman, you have to think, I need to protect my running back, (returning All-Region selection) Jonah Daniel, and I got to protect that quarterback, Logan Helcher. I have to protect them at all costs because they are the key to this season."

The GHSA's two-week delay also applies to scrimmage contests. Should the schools decide to go ahead with the preseason games,

Union and Towns would square off on Aug. 21 - the date of the previously scheduled season opener. The following Thursday (Aug. 27), the Panthers and White County will get together for the second and final tune-up game.

The season will now get underway Sept. 4 when Union hosts rival Fannin County, who dropped to Class AA but elected to play in the northwest Georgia region (7-AA with Dade County, Gordon Central, Coosa, etc) instead of 8-AA.

The GHSA's most recent COVID-19 statement:

"The GHSA and the Sports Medicine Advisory Council appreciates our member schools' continued efforts in the successful implementation of the Coronavirus Guidance Plan.

"As I am sure you are all aware, the Board of Trustees voted Monday to move back the start of the football season two weeks later. This does not affect the start of acclimatization or the first date of practice. Scrimmages and games are pushed back two weeks, practice remains the same. In order to keep Girls Flag Football aligned with 11-man football championships, the season has been slightly adjusted (dates are on the GHSA web site). All other Fall sports and activities will remain as scheduled on the original calendar.

"After our meeting today, the GHSA has elected to utilize the following Guidance for Acclimatization and Practice with recommendations and/or restrictions.

"NOTE: This information concerning Guidance for Acclimatization and Practice with recommendations and/or restrictions, is for the Acclimation Period and start of practice on August 1st. The previous recommendations and/or restrictions are still in place for voluntary summer conditioning which prohibits inter squad (between schools) scrimmages.

"The GHSA Office is expecting all schools to continue reporting any and all Positive COVID-19 cases (list positive test date, athlete or coach, and sport) results since June 8th.

In addition to the positive cases, we are requesting you report any and all individuals who have been screened out of any conditioning workouts (list date screened out, athlete or coach, and sport).

"Recommendations and restrictions are fluid and subject to change. Safety must be our top priority."