September 5, 2020

Re: FCIAC Coaches’ input regarding the current football season

Dear Governor Lamont, Department of Health, and CIAC board:

The news of the decision yesterday to cancel the upcoming football season has devastated football-playing student-athletes throughout Connecticut. While these students, their parents, and their coaches understand the magnitude of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, the upheaval caused in their lives by this decision cannot be overstated. High school football players in Connecticut and throughout the country, play football for much more than the result on the scoreboard at the end of the game. Football is critical to the physical, social, emotional, and psychological well-being of many students. The sport teaches valuable life lessons that are difficult to duplicate in other phases of their lives. These values include the importance of discipline, hard work, leadership, accountability, determination, teamwork, overcoming obstacles, and selflessness. Regardless of a football player’s background, if you ask a former or current high school football player, what is or was the most valuable part of their secondary education; most will answer football. After the news yesterday, the very values football teaches are the ones that are most tested. What we don’t want to teach is that people in positions of authority can unilaterally take away something that they have dedicated themselves for a decade. What we don’t want to teach is that leaders can be so rigid that they can’t find solutions to difficult problems. What we don’t want to teach is to give up in the face of obstacles. What we don’t want to teach is that hard work does not pay off in difficult situations. I am sure you do not want to condone those self-defeating lessons.

We admit that as coaches and mentors, we are very protective of our players’ physical and mental well-being. Both the coaches and players of the FCIAC do not accept that football can’t be safely played this 2020-2021 school year in Connecticut. The population of our great state has done a tremendous job mitigating the spread of COVID-19, which is what makes returning to school and playing sports plausible. In fact, the 0.7% COVID-19 positivity rate is the lowest in the entire country. In addition, the student population in the country has seen fewer hospitalizations in the last 8 months due to COVID-19 (8 per 100,000) than the annual rate of hospitalizations due to Influenza (30 per 100,000). Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a total of 1 death in the 10-19 age group in Connecticut. Yet despite, Connecticut’s vigilance controlling COVID-19, Connecticut finds itself as the only state in the entire country where football has been canceled for this entire school year. Some states are playing their fourth games this weekend, others have postponed their season until the spring. However, sadly and ironically, the one state where playing football would be the safest due to its low positivity rate is the one state in which the powers that be have combined to cancel the season.

We understand the nature of a new virus is to potentially spread any time people congregate. Thus, this risk of increased virus transmission is a possibility as school reopens. This possibility has understandably led to states postponing football until the spring. As fall sports coaches, we are very aware of the absence of the spring sports season and we hope to work with all sports so that every athlete can play all their sports. We are also acutely aware that in many instances these student football players have spent over a decade preparing to play on the gridiron and we want to guarantee the possibility that they are able to compete in a meaningful season despite trying circumstances. To that end, the FCIAC football coaches ask for the following:

1. Governor Lamont to immediately overturn the recommendations of the DPH and let football proceed like every other fall sport. If volleyball players can wear a mask and be allowed to play, why can’t football players wear a mask or protective shield and be allowed to play as well? The coaches and the players understand that football, fall sports, and even school may not be able to proceed. If fall sports are suspended, they should be restarted on March 1st if certain metrics are met including either <1% COVID positivity, or an available and distributed vaccine or positive COVID antibody testing of >50%. If these are not the metrics that the DPH feels are safe for playing football, then we would want the DPH to be transparent in elucidating the exact metrics needed to make playing football acceptable in this era of COVID.

2. Either due to a fall season suspension or if Governor Lamont decides not to over-rule the DPH, then we as coaches insist that football be postponed to March 1st and a schedule of 6 games + 2 playoff games are played in that period (conditioning and practice can be held in late February so players are ready to play the 1st game
on March 13th.) The season would conclude on April 30th, which would allow for 8 games in total. The coaches also understand that some viral mitigation techniques may be used including the use of shields or masks, as well as the possibility of football players being asked to participate in remote learning during the football season and until 2 weeks after its conclusion to minimize any chance of spread from the football team to the general student body and vice versa.

3. The schedule for sports could be the following:
   
   Jan 1 – Feb 28 for winter sports
   
   March 1 – April 30 for football and other suspended traditional fall sports
   
   May 1 – June 30 for spring sports
   
   There would have to be a 2-week period at the end of the prior season where players not participating in the prior season could practice with the upcoming season. For example, on April 15th lacrosse and baseball players could start to practice with their Spring sports if they were not playing football.

   We believe that by planning ahead and being flexible and fluid, this proposal gives all the student-athletes a chance to play in a meaningful season after years of preparation and hard work, while at the same time mitigating the risk of COVID transmission. We know the Governor, DPH, CIAC, and Athletic Directors all have our players’ complete physical, emotional, and psychosocial well-being as paramount. We believe this proposal protects and promotes this well-being.

   Thank you for your consideration,

   **Mitchell Ross**  
   Fairfield Ludlowe High School

   **Duncan Dellavolpe**  
   Fairfield Warde High School

   **Lou Marinelli**  
   New Canaan High School

   **Michael Forget**  
   Darien High School

   **Marc Petroccio**  
   Trumbull High School

   **Joe Devellis**  
   Westhill High School

   **Anthony Morello**  
   Greenwich High School

   **Adam Behrends**  
   Staples High School

   **Edward Dinunzio**  
   Wilton High School

   **Kevin Callahan**  
   Ridgefield High School

   **Patrick Miller**  
   Norwalk High School

   **Jeffrey Zacrioga**  
   McMahon High School

   **Augustine Tieri**  
   Danbury High School

   **Jamar Greene**  
   Stamford High School

   **Joseph Dellavechia**  
   St. Joseph High School