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SUBJECT: SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT - PRESENTATIONS/INFORMATION

VHSL: Year-Round Practice Rule – Mr. Fields

BACKGROUND: Will Fields, Athletic Director, will explain the “year-round practice rule” – what it is, how it came to be, and its impact on small (including Bath) and large school divisions.

Several newspaper articles as background information are included for your information.

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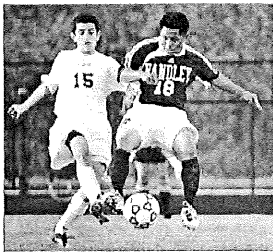
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Posted at 12:22 AM Jul. 13, 2011 | Updated: 6:58 AM Jul. 13, 2011 1 1

Practical measure?: New VHSL rule allows nearly year-round practice



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Millbrook's Santiago Sanchez and Handley's Geovanni Jimenez battle for the ball on April 26. In February, the VHSL modified a rule to allow prep teams to hold practices almost year-round, though the freedom of Region II teams to do so will be severely limited. Judges coach Cosmo Balio and Pioneers coach Keith Kilmer both support the change. Dennis Grundman/Daily file

By Jeremy Stafford - jstafford@nvdaily.com

In late February the Virginia High School League approved a measure that may jump-start the evolution of local athletics even as it begins the slow, inevitable decimation of the versatile three-sport athlete.

The measure will take effect Aug. 1, and will enable high school coaches to work with their athletes nearly year-round -- with the exception of four dead periods and every Sunday.

At the start of each athletics season -- that is, from the first practice of an in-season sport -- out-of-season practices will observe a 10-day dead period, contrived to allow athletes time to try out for, and practice with, an in-season team without having to be concerned with an out-of-season sport. There are three such dead periods.

A fourth dead period will occur during the first week of the National Federation of State High School Association's standardized calendar year, which typically starts in early July.

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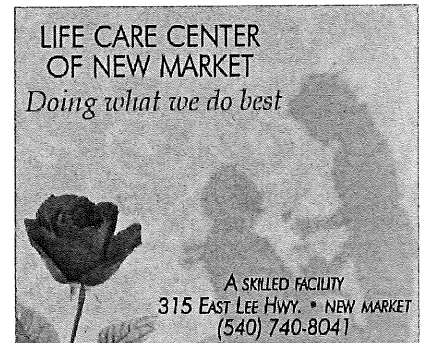
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The benefits of this new measure are obvious: "It gives kids the opportunity to grow and develop," Sherando girls basketball coach Kevin Reed said. "It's no different from when a kid is allowed to be tutored in the summer, or to get extra help.

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The rule change allows Reed, about to begin his second



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season at Sherando, the luxury of building off the success the Warriors saw when they set a school record for wins in a season last year. It also allows athletes like Sherando rising senior Morgan Sirbaugh, who is looking to play basketball in college, the convenience of being able to work with Reed whenever she'd like.

But here's the problem: While the VHSL's rule requires out-of-season teams to remain idle only during the four dead periods, it also allows for regions and districts to establish further sanctions on their own schools. In all of Group AA, only Region II has done so.

Under the Region II sanction, teams in the Northwestern, Dulles, Evergreen and Jefferson districts are allowed only 15

days of out-of-season practice prior to a season, 15 days of practice following a season, and 10 days of practice during the summer.

To recap: Region I, III and IV teams must remain idle for a minimum of about 40 days; Region II teams are given a maximum of only 40 days of extra practice.

This puts local teams at a severe disadvantage should they make the Group AA state tournament.

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Kilmer further explained that there are wrinkles in the measure that the VHSL, and the various regions, are still ironing out. Because the rule change is so radical, and because it affects athletics programs so substantially, nothing, as of yet, is impervious to modification.

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In any case, having an extra month of practice, even if it is demonstrably minute compared with the allowance given every other school in Group AA, is still enthralling for coaches, and it still provides teams and players the opportunity to improve tremendously in the offseason.

"Until this point we've only been allowed to do conditioning and open gyms," Handley boys soccer coach Cosmo Balio said. "Now you're telling me I get a month's worth of practice through the offseason?"

"I'm excited to do that."

What might not be so exciting is the effect this practice mandate may have on the three-sport athletes, which make up so many of this area's teams. Because such athletes might lack the time and flexibility to participate in out-of-season practices, they could be more inclined to specialize in only one or two sports.

Calls made to Region B athletic directors, whose schools are far more dependent on multiple-sport athletes than are Group AA schools, were not returned.

But perhaps this single-sport specialization has been a developing trend that's only now beginning to gain momentum -- or at least notice.

"Personally, I think that's where kids have been headed before this rule was put in place," Reed said.

"Coming from Loudoun County, it's natural for a kid to be sport specific. Anytime a kid has a goal to play in college, they should be sport specific.

"But I take pride in, after nine years of coaching high school, I've never told a kid that they shouldn't play a sport."

Not every coach has such a fair-minded demeanor. Indeed, while many area coaches are thrilled about the opportunity to spend an extra month with their teams, there's a growing concern that they'll lose many of their multiple-sport athletes -- sometimes at the behest of another coach.

The concern works like this: While out-of-season practices aren't mandatory, an athlete's failure to attend a certain number of practices -- even if the athlete is committed to an in-season sport -- could presumably affect playing time or even starting positions in athletic seasons yet-to-come.

"I think there's a possibility, unfortunately, that there could be some coaches that might want to persuade players to come to one sport," Kilmer said. "I personally have found that players play better for me when they go off and play other things, and then come back to me.

"There's a risk that I could lose some players -- that's always a possibility."

Perhaps just as worrying is the concern that those athletes who decide to become sport specific might quickly lose their enthusiasm for a sport they at one time played only a handful of months out of the year. This is particularly troubling for volleyball, soccer and basketball players, who often play on club and



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Amateur Athletic Union teams in addition to their high school teams.

This kind of focus can lead to overexposure -- the athlete gets burned out, as they say -- and can hinder the performance of an entire team.

"Are we going to over train them?" Balio said. "There may not be a difference between a kid coming in Sept. 3 to gear up for a season versus the day we have real tryouts -- I don't think that excitement is there.

"Would the football team throw pads on in February? There's lots of question marks that need answered."

At least one concern has been dealt with recently.

Under the initial measure, if a high school coach coached even one of his high school athletes on a club or AAU team, the practices for that club team would count toward the 40 days of out-of-season practices allotted to that coach under the Region II statute.

Kilmer was most affected by this: He said about a third of his Winchester United soccer team comprises Millbrook soccer players. His club soccer practices this coming fall, under the February rule, would have consumed the entirety of Millbrook's allotted out-of-season practices.

Last week, the rule was changed to allow coaches like Kilmer the chance to remain with their club teams without penalty, as long as the club team is not made entirely of that coach's high school team.

"I think there was a strong outcry from Loudoun County people more than anybody," Kilmer said.

"Nothing's written in stone yet -- [the VHSL] is still waiting to get people's thoughts, and I'll applaud them for that.

"They didn't jump and say, 'This is the bible, this is what it is.'"

But there's little the VHSL can do to deter athletes from becoming sport specific. With so many athletes hoping to garner athletic scholarships in college, it only makes sense, now that they have the opportunity, to practice one sport year-round with their coach and team.

Sherando graduate Krista DeCeault, for example, at one time ran cross country in the fall, played basketball in the winter, and played soccer in the spring. By her senior year she had given up basketball and soccer and participated instead with Sherando's indoor and outdoor track teams. By becoming sport specific, she won a Group AA state title in the 3,200 -meter run and earned a Division I scholarship to run at Illinois State University.

This, it seems, will become the norm in the coming years. And the predomination of the three-sport athlete, once a boasting point for local athletics, is quickly fading out of existence, and may soon become an obsolete peculiarity.

"It's really going to go by the wayside in a couple years," Balio said. "I don't know if it's the parents' mindset of, 'We need to focus on one sport if we want to have a college scholarship,' or not. Sure, we want that special kid that has honed his skills, but we'll also take the all-around athlete.


"That's the way our society has gone -- we're so quick to place accolades on kids when they're 10, and we're not giving them a chance to expand. ... It's weird that we're doing that to kids, and this rule enhances it."

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 This is a very well-written article with lots of pros and cons. I personally am proud of what the Region II athletic directors did. One thing to keep in mind for athletes. There is a finite number of college scholarships out there. If everyone starts training year round in one sport, that really doesn't help your chances. This is like saying there wouldn't be a parking problem if everyone just arrived a half hour earlier.

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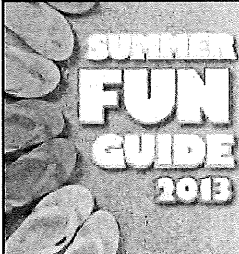
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Year-round practices approach [Back](#)

New rule receives mixed reaction from locals

Sunday, July 31, 2011
By PAUL MONTANA - Bulletin Sports Writer

Fall sports practices begin Monday. That's nothing new. But 10 days later, practices start for basketball. And soccer. And softball. And wrestling. And every other sport sanctioned by the Virginia High School League (VHSL).

Because high school sports are now becoming just about year-round. Effective Monday, a new VHSL rule will allow team-sanctioned practices for all the sports in their respective off-seasons, erasing the old off-season rule where teams could only have weightlifting and conditioning sessions.

Naturally, this rule has some enthused and others skeptical - more on those views later. But first, a more in-depth description of the rule and its justification.

THE RULE
The new VHSL rule states that the only times teams are barred from holding activities are on Sundays and during four 10-day dead periods. Three of those dead periods mark the tryout dates for each of the fall, winter and spring sports seasons, while the fourth is in the middle of July.

Also, although not explicitly stated in the VHSL handbook, Martinsville High School athletic director Tommy Golding said that off-season practices cannot be made mandatory.

Still, just going by the VHSL rule, teams can hold practice for roughly 277 out of the 365 days in a year. But it's not quite that simple.

Making matters even more complex, the VHSL left it up to each region to establish further limitations to the rule. In Region IV, which includes the Piedmont District, teams may have only two "sports-specific" practices per week - but that does not include conditioning and lifting.

According to Golding, the Region III governing body decided to add no limitations. Teams from the Seminole, Blue Ridge and Massanutten districts can practice whenever they want, other than Sundays and dead periods.

But even in Region IV, teams may have five consecutive "practices" per week throughout the year - two practices of any kind, and three weightlifting and conditioning sessions.

"No doubt, somebody will probably work out every day almost, and some coaches won't change much at all," MVHS football coach Joe Favero said.

The justification for this rule, Golding said, is simple: Even though off-season practice wasn't technically allowed previously, teams were finding loopholes in the rule to do it anyway.

For example, the old rule stated that you couldn't use the high school's equipment during practices. But, Golding said, a simple way around that was to use equipment from a parks and recreation department.

On top of that, you weren't allowed to have "team-sanctioned" practices. But an easy way to get around that rule, Golding said, was to mix players from two teams, and then it wasn't "team-sanctioned" anymore.

"I couldn't practice basketball, but I could go to Bassett, and if Bassett gave me one of their kids, and I gave Bassett one of my kids, we could have full, live scrimmages," Golding explained. "Hidden Valley and Cave Spring, they can practice all the time because they're within walking distance of each other."

But rather than closing the loopholes, VHSL decided to open up the off-season to practice. And that comes with a few concerns.

THE CONCERNS
For one, PD coaches interviewed for this story unanimously agreed that these rules will put pressure on athletes to specialize in one sport over the others, which is not necessarily a positive outcome.

"At other schools, and I'm not mentioning any names, they didn't want their kids to play other sports even when they couldn't practice year-round," MHS boys soccer coach Pete Scouras said, adding that that would only get worse with the new rule. "I don't think that's fair to the student-athlete, I really don't."

And increased sport-specialization doesn't just affect the athletes. At smaller schools in Groups AA and A, the two-sport and three-sport athlete isn't just a common occurrence; it may be a necessity to the overall success of a high school program.

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"At Bassett with 1,100 kids, or Magna Vista with (1,000) kids, or Martinsville with 700 or 800 kids, you don't have enough kids to specify in every sport," BHS boys soccer coach Larry Wylie said. "You're gonna have to have dual-sport athletes or tri-sport athletes. It's just a numbers game."□

All coaches interviewed for this story said they were willing to be flexible in not forcing their players to commit to their sport over the others. But that may not hold for every coach in the state.

"There's gonna be coaches that abuse the rule," MVHS softball coach Brian Brinegar said. "They're gonna take full advantage of it, and gonna put a lot of pressure on the kids to decide which sport to play."□

"A lot of these kids around think that they're already Division I (college) athletes," said BHS football coach Jay Gilbert. "And if they think that they have permission now to work on their sport year-round, well the coaches are gonna chime in and say, OK, let's do it," as opposed to encouraging athletes to try other sports.

Another concern is when athletes will find time to study.

In the modern era, high school athletes often are involved in multiple sports year-round as it is. In addition to the high school sports seasons, there's AAU, American Legion baseball, PYSL travel soccer and the list goes on.

Now at the high school level, coaches are essentially being given permission to run their teams similar to college programs, with practices almost every day year-round. Unless athletes are willing to make a sacrifice somewhere, there will be less free time for schoolwork.

"It's high school. They're not getting paid, they don't have a scholarship, they're not having their school paid for," Scouras said. "It's supposed to be fun, you're supposed to be learning, you're supposed to be enjoying yourself.

"I can see the good parts, but I can also see it becoming a real problem for a lot of kids, especially when they're trying to pass their studies."□

Magna Vista athletic director Mike Minter was taking a wait-and-see stance on how the rule would impact students' grades.

"In the past, AAU coaches had our students in the offseason, and it didn't matter what your grades were, you were still gonna play," he said. "Now, our coaches are gonna be able to be with them two days a week, have their finger on 'em and making sure they're doing their work.

"We're gonna have to take some time and look at this and see if it is what's best for students. ... Ultimately if it hurts a kid academically, we're gonna have to revisit the rule, because that's important - getting an education and making it to the next level."□

Finally, several coaches wondered allowed why the VHSL left it up to the individual regions to add their own limitations. That's "what bothers me the most," Scouras said.

"Why can't we all be on the same playing field?" said Gilbert. "I think the whole state ought to make one rule - Virginia High School League should say this is our rule for whatever division - A, AA, AAA, doesn't matter."□

THE PROS

The biggest positive that comes out of VHSL allowing off-season practices, Golding said, is that prohibiting high school coaches from off-season contact with high school athletes has limited their progress.

"Would you rather have Joe Blow out here working with your kid, who really could undo every bit that you had, or would you rather have the qualified high school coaches with them?" Golding said.

Coaches throughout the PD echoed and elaborated on this sentiment. Off-season coaching allows for more teaching of fundamentals and less re-teaching once the season starts.

"I think kids will become better skilled in all the sports, because they can get more individualized instruction," Favero said. "Obviously with football, you've got 80 kids (on the team), and you're not gonna have that in the offseason, so kids can get more individualized instruction. Hopefully that will lead to better technique and just better skill for that individual kid."□

The rule will not allow football teams to wear pads during offseason practices. Instead, only helmets and no-contact drills will be permissible.

BHS girls basketball and girls soccer coach Melissa Blair noted the frustration of watching her players play pickup in the off-season, unable to say a word.

"If you're doing things wrong and you're reemphasizing the negatives, then you're not getting anything done," Blair said. "So this is gonna be a great opportunity to really work on things that you're not gonna have time to work on in the season."□

Golding added that the rule also helps with player-safety issues. For example, a high school baseball coach wouldn't have to worry about another coach "pitching my kid to death," he said.

And as for study time being impacted, Golding noted that allowing increased contact with high school coaches also allows for year-round supervision of grades.

"I've got kids that, in the past, they had their coach during their season, and then they weren't allowed to be with that one role model that they had," Golding said. "It's gonna now allow my coach to be around them more to be a better influence and to monitor that child more."□

Finally, Golding did admit that VHSL ideally would make a blanket rule that did not differ by region. But he said that simply wasn't logistically possible.

"Everybody knew something had to be done, (but) the VHSL knew they could not please everybody," Golding said.

Furthermore, teams from different regions don't play each other often in the regular season; the truly significant meetings come in the state tournament. And by that time, would a couple more off-season practices really matter?

"Once you get to the state level, you can throw out all the other (practices)," Golding said. "Because if I make it (to the state tournament), it's not gonna matter that much if you had 200 more swings than I got, or were in the gym three more days than I was."□

THE FINAL WORD

Of all the area's coaches interviewed for this story, none were complete proponents or opponents to the new rule, one that Golding said will be "heavily scrutinized this year."□

Moreover, coaches unanimously said they would work with their colleagues to limit any possible negative effects.

"I think a lot of that's gonna hinge on the coaches actually saying, "Look, you're OK, we'll work something out, you can still work out and play your other sports as well," Wylie said. "Because I don't think it's fair to have it set up so kids have to basically make a choice."□

There may be a coach somewhere in the state who will take the rule to the extreme; who may pressure athletes to play their sport and not the others; who may use this rule to get a leg up on coaches who are cooperative with their players and colleagues.

But there doesn't seem to be a coach from the PD taking such a stance at this juncture.

"I won't let it affect me, because it's the girls first for me," Brinegar said. "It's not all about winning. I love to win, but I'm not gonna sacrifice other sports to make mine the only winning program at the school."□

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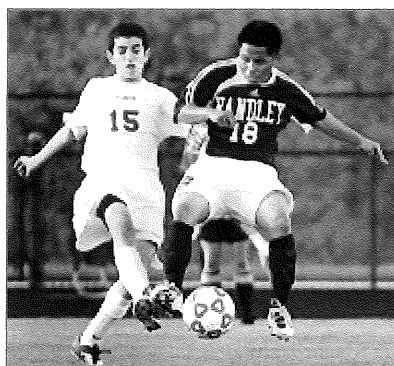
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The rule change allows Reed, about to begin his second season at Sherando, the luxury of building off the success the Warriors saw when they set a school record for wins in a season last year. It also allows athletes like Sherando rising senior Morgan Sirbaugh, who is looking to play basketball in college, the convenience of being able to work with Reed whenever she'd like.

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Calls made to Region B athletic directors, whose schools are far more dependent on multiple-sport

athletes than are Group AA schools, were not returned.

But perhaps this single-sport specialization has been a developing trend that's only now beginning to gain momentum -- or at least notice.

"Personally, I think that's where kids have been headed before this rule was put in place," Reed said.

"Coming from Loudoun County, it's natural for a kid to be sport specific. Anytime a kid has a goal to play in college, they should be sport specific.

"But I take pride in, after nine years of coaching high school, I've never told a kid that they shouldn't play a sport."

Not every coach has such a fair-minded demeanor. Indeed, while many area coaches are thrilled about the opportunity to spend an extra month with their teams, there's a growing concern that they'll lose many of their multiple-sport athletes -- sometimes at the behest of another coach.

The concern works like this: While out-of-season practices aren't mandatory, an athlete's failure to attend a certain number of practices -- even if the athlete is committed to an in-season sport -- could presumably affect playing time or even starting positions in athletic seasons yet-to-come.

"I think there's a possibility, unfortunately, that there could be some coaches that might want to persuade players to come to one sport," Kilmer said. "I personally have found that players play better for me when they go off and play other things, and then come back to me.

"There's a risk that I could lose some players -- that's always a possibility."

Perhaps just as worrying is the concern that those athletes who decide to become sport specific might quickly lose their enthusiasm for a sport they at one time played only a handful of months out of the year. This is particularly troubling for volleyball, soccer and basketball players, who often play on club and Amateur Athletic Union teams in addition to their high school teams.

This kind of focus can lead to overexposure -- the athlete gets burned out, as they say -- and can hinder the performance of an entire team.

"Are we going to over train them?" Balio said. "There may not be a difference between a kid coming in Sept. 3 to gear up for a season versus the day we have real tryouts -- I don't think that excitement is there.

"Would the football team throw pads on in February? There's lots of question marks that need answered."

At least one concern has been dealt with recently.

Under the initial measure, if a high school coach coached even one of his high school athletes on a club or AAU team, the practices for that club team would count toward the 40 days of out-of-season practices allotted to that coach under the Region II statute.

Kilmer was most affected by this: He said about a third of his Winchester United soccer team comprises Millbrook soccer players. His club soccer practices this coming fall, under the February rule, would have consumed the entirety of Millbrook's allotted out-of-season practices.

Last week, the rule was changed to allow coaches like Kilmer the chance to remain with their club teams without penalty, as long as the club team is not made entirely of that coach's high school team.

"I think there was a strong outcry from Loudoun County people more than anybody," Kilmer said. "Nothing's written in stone yet -- [the VHSL] is still waiting to get people's thoughts, and I'll applaud them for that.

"They didn't jump and say, 'This is the bible, this is what it is.'"

But there's little the VHSL can do to deter athletes from becoming sport specific. With so many athletes hoping to garner athletic scholarships in college, it only makes sense, now that they have the opportunity, to practice one sport year-round with their coach and team.

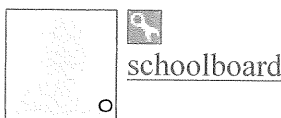
Sherando graduate Krista DeCeault, for example, at one time ran cross country in the fall, played basketball in the winter, and played soccer in the spring. By her senior year she had given up basketball and soccer and participated instead with Sherando's indoor and outdoor track teams. By becoming sport specific, she won a Group AA state title in the 3,200 -meter run and earned a Division I scholarship to run at Illinois State University.

This, it seems, will become the norm in the coming years. And the predomination of the three-sport athlete, once a boasting point for local athletics, is quickly fading out of existence, and may soon become an obsolete peculiarity.

"It's really going to go by the wayside in a couple years," Balio said. "I don't know if it's the parents' mindset of, 'We need to focus on one sport if we want to have a college scholarship,' or not. Sure, we want that special kid that has honed his skills, but we'll also take the all-around athlete.

"That's the way our society has gone -- we're so quick to place accolades on kids when they're 10, and we're not giving them a chance to expand. ... It's weird that we're doing that to kids, and this rule enhances it."

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This is a very well-written article with lots of pros and cons. I personally am proud of what the Region II athletic directors did. One thing to keep in mind for athletes. There is a finite number of college scholarships out there. If everyone starts training year round in one sport, that really doesn't help your chances. This is like saying there wouldn't be a parking problem if everyone just arrived a half hour earlier.

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The Washington Post

VHSL passes measure to allow coaches to work with athletes almost year-round

Advertisement

By Preston Williams
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, February 23, 2011; 7:26 PM

In a dramatic change that alters the ground rules for high school athletic instruction throughout the state, the Virginia High School League Executive Committee on Wednesday passed a measure that will enable coaches to work with their athletes almost year-round.

Other than 10-day "dead periods" at the start of each high school sports season and a similar week-long period in the summer, high school coaches will be authorized to work with their athletes any day except Sunday. Coaches previously could work with their athletes only during that sport's season. Individual schools, districts and regions can establish more restrictive guidelines.

Fairfax Athletic Director Tim Gordon, who chairs a Northern Region committee that has been studying the out-of-season practice rule and crafting its own version, considers the change among the most sweeping he has seen in 30 years of coaching and administrating high school sports.

"I think the bottom line is the realization that what we had was kind of broken and hard to enforce," Gordon said. "It just became antiquated with the needs of students and the desire of students and parents. Kids wanting to get extra help and individualized attention, instead of having to pay to go to a clinic or camp or outside group, they can actually get it from their own coach [now] for free."

VHSL catastrophic insurance will not apply to out-of-season activities, so jurisdictions are unlikely to hold, say, spring football practice. The new policy takes effect Aug. 1.

Gordon said that the Northern Region would like to have its out-of-season practice policy finalized by May. The broad state guidelines passed by a 20-6 vote, after years of various failed proposals.

"Kids are looking for leadership, for instruction, and curtailing the high school coach and teacher who is trained as a teacher and coach forces kids sometimes to look to people that really maybe don't have the best interest of the individual student at heart," Westfield girls' basketball Coach Pat Deegan said. "It's important that kids be given as much supervision and leadership as possible because in today's day and age, kids are interested in more than just November to March. They're looking to expand their skills."

Not every coach is in favor of the rule change. Battlefield football Coach Mark Cox, whose team won the Virginia AAA Division 6 title last season, believes it could hinder high school athletic programs as a whole.

"Most coaches would like for their kids to spend as much time as possible on their sport," Cox said. "Kids

will specialize way too much. I think you'll have less cooperation among coaches within schools.

"I had good basketball players on my football team. Now they might not play football if they can do organized stuff in the fall for basketball to get ready for their season."


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
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