



To: NJSIAA Executive Committee
From: Colleen Maguire, Executive Director
Date: November 15, 2023
RE: Summary of Scheduling Dates

Background

In June 2021, NJSIAA Executive Committee approved a proposal that brought changes to the season dates for all sports, with the exception of football. The proposal, which prioritized consistency, equity and flexibility, took effect with the 2022 – 2023 school year. NJSIAA staff has been soliciting feedback on these changes while also reaching out to peer states to identify best practices. The goal of this proposal is to continue to provide scheduling flexibility for our leagues and conferences and member schools while striving for minimal season/sport overlaps that provide all stakeholders with necessary time off. This proposal is the result of several meetings with the officers of NJSIAA leagues and conferences, best practices learned from other states and consultation with the NJSIAA Sports Medical Advisory Committee (SMAC).

Overview

For all sports, with the exception of football, schools may schedule scrimmages and regular season contests once the 6-days of practice/1-day of rest rule has been satisfied.

There is no limit on the number of scrimmages; however, once a regular season contest has been played and reported, then no future contest may be considered a scrimmage – all contests will count towards the maximum number of competitions.

There are no changes to the maximum number of competitions for any sport.

Leagues and conferences will have the flexibility to establish their schedules to help minimize disruptions due to religious holidays and other factors that may impact their schools ability to host interscholastic competition. Member schools will have the flexibility to schedule a non-league/non-conference contest at their discretion. Non-league/non-conference contests will count towards the maximum number of competitions if the school recognizes and reports it as a regular season contest.

Lastly, sports committees may recommend state tournament dates that end prior to the competition end date – this may be necessary when there are scheduling conflicts (such as sport specific recruiting, club, or showcase events). The proposal provides 3 weeks for competition for fall and spring season state tournaments; however, many sports only need 2 weeks to complete their state tournament. These sports will have the flexibility to determine their state tournament dates but will not start earlier than the Tournament Start Week dates listed.

Fall Season

The scheduling framework will establish a consistent 14-week season, which is consistent with the current winter season and proposed spring season.

Scheduling framework:

- Competition End Date – Sunday preceding Thanksgiving week (excluding football)
- Practice Start Date – Count back 14 weeks from Competition End Date
- Tournament Start Week – Count back 3 weeks from Competition End Date
- Football/Girls Tennis – Practice Start Date – Count back 15 weeks from Competition End Date

Example for FY '24 -'25

Practice Start Date (FB/G Tennis) – August 12th
Practice Start Date – August 19th
Labor Day – September 2nd
Tournament Start Week – November 4th
Competition End Date – November 24th
Thanksgiving – November 28th

Example for FY '26 – '27

Practice Start Date (FB/G Tennis) – August 10th
Practice Start Date – August 17th
Labor Day – September 7th
Tournament Start Week – November 2nd
Competition End Date – November 22nd
Thanksgiving – November 26th

The corresponding date in November will be used every year to count back and set the fall practice and tournament start dates. In most years, the tournament start date will be the first Monday in November (range is November 1st – November 4th for the next four years) and tournaments will end between the second and third full week in November.

Winter Season

The only change to the winter season is that leagues and conferences, and member schools, will have flexibility to schedule scrimmages and regular season contests once the 6-days of practice/1-day of rest rule has been satisfied. There are no changes to the practice start dates for each sport (i.e., either the Monday prior to Thanksgiving or the Monday after Thanksgiving). In addition, there are no changes to the state tournament dates or competition end date that are approved for the 2023-2024 winter season.

Spring Season

The scheduling framework will establish a consistent 14-week season, which is consistent with the current winter season and proposed fall season.

Scheduling framework:

- Competition End Date – Sunday preceding NJ Juneteenth state holiday
- Practice Start Date – Count back 14 weeks from Competition End Date
- Tournament Start Week – Count back 3 weeks from Competition End Date

Example for FY '24 -'25

Practice Start Date – March 10th
Memorial Day – May 26th
Tournament Start Week – May 27th
Competition End Date – June 15th
NJ Juneteenth Holiday – June 20th

Example for FY '26 – '27

Practice Start Date – March 8th
Memorial Day – May 31st
Tournament Start Week – May 24th
Competition End Date – June 13th
NJ Juneteenth Holiday – June 18th

The corresponding date will be used every year to count back and set the spring practice and tournament start dates (Sunday preceding NJ Juneteenth state holiday is usually the 2nd Sunday in June).

Rationale

Many states have moved away from establishing one arbitrary date for the start of competition. They allow their leagues and conferences and member schools the flexibility to determine when they start scrimmages and/or regular season competition. This allows schools to navigate religious holidays, testing schedules and other school district-recognized events. In addition, the use of corresponding dates simplifies scheduling for leagues and conferences – both for regular season schedules and league or conference tournament dates. Relying on holidays (such as Labor Day or Memorial Day) to establish dates can cause variability in certain years when the holiday falls very early or very late.

The NJSIAA SMAC reviewed and endorsed this proposal at its October meeting. The SMAC acknowledges there is no national standard to adhere to regarding the length of a preseason and understand the importance of providing leagues and conferences and member schools flexibility to schedule events around factors that may impact their school district schedule. However, the SMAC does caution member schools that there is an increased likelihood of injury earlier in the season and that schools should not rush to schedule regular season events. The flexibility to spread out regular season events during the course of the season is necessary to reduce risks of injury and overtraining.

Lastly, NJSIAA solicited feedback over the course of three meetings with the officers of its leagues and conferences – the majority of which were in support of this proposal and appreciative of the flexibility and consistency that this proposal brings across all sports and all seasons. This proposal allows adequate time to host county and league/conference tournaments which are important to member schools. It is important to note that their support was accompanied by the request that NJSIAA staff does not consider future proposals from any sport committee to increase their game maximum – leagues and conferences unanimously support the game maximum limits that are currently in place.