

What are the odds? Are recreational sports in jeopardy post-COVID-19?

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The year has arrived where sports families have encountered uncharted territory.

It's already July and not a single summer sports league has resumed from house league to rep. Semi-professional leagues are still figuring it out and professional sports leagues in Europe have resumed.

When you envision a sports league decommissioned for the year, it's usually professional. It's usually a lockout over financial disputes or disagreements that involve players. The 2011 NBA lockout insinuated when the 2005 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) expired. Teams stopped working and voila, a tumultuous disagreement proceeded.

Whereas here, this is a very different scenario. We're talking about youth; adolescents seeking to make names for themselves for semi-pro and professional affiliates. We're also talking about young athletes playing sports and learning team camaraderie.

It was only months ago, speculations began on what protocols might look like and when seasons would begin. But we haven't gotten there yet. Caledon entities such as the Bolton Wanderers, Bolton Brewers and Caledon Minor Baseball shut down as soon as this pandemic hit; like everyone else.

In May, Volleyball Canada released A Safe Return to Volleyball guideline to ensure their players have an outline on how to approach the summer.

Founder of Storm Volleyball Club in Aurora, Bruce Stafford claims the heads of this sport were well prepared with protocols.

"Both Volleyball Canada and Ontario Volleyball have been well ahead of the game with master plans and protocols and the whole bit. They've been following along and communicating with all of our organizations," Stafford explained.

This document suggests volleyball training be moved outdoors with limited participants. Small group numbers have been encouraged until health officials deem it safe to proceed with higher numbers. Even that is the case, that might not be the right decision to have too many athletes all close together.

"I wish it would be that they don't. The main reason behind it is one of the reasons why we're not running any summer beach camps this year in any form. We could, with the protocols in place we could run one coach and four athletes on a court and try to leave space on the court. It's not worth the risk or the aggravation I guess, on trying to do something on such a small scale."

Stafford says running a full program will have difficulty adhering to the social distancing measures and further protocols in place. Some teams are currently practicing with limited athletes outdoors to stay in shape and that's about all they can do.

Within 2020's tapestry of events, it's quite difficult to solve the problem with clarity. USports across Ontario cancelled their fall competitions outright. Stafford says volleyball is set to return in January of 2021 and even that might not be enough. He believes there will be further delays closer to the end of the year.

Shuddered from the colossal impact of this virus, what is the next move for parents and their children? Health officials are forewarning citizens to be aware of a second wave later on this year.

A survey conducted by LeagueSide in the United States as described in a webinar hosted by the American University in Washington D.C. says, "49 per cent of parents believe their children will be less likely to participate in youth sports due to financial circumstances, which could leave 20 million kids on the sidelines."

Written in the power point presentation and described by Keith Scully and Matt Winkler, 50 per cent of youth sports organizations are at high levels or risk of closing down.

League commissioners and presidents believe; according to LeagueApps, 89 per cent of sports businesses will be severely disrupted, 78 per cent of organizers believe children will not sign up out of fear and 74 per cent of organizations believe their sport will be shut down again due to another COVID-19 wave.

Assuming this is strictly the United States, is Canada all that far off? In smaller numbers we could be equally at the same risk. It wouldn't be a rash assumption, as a matter of fact, it's probably more logical.

It's all speculation on our end but sports are in jeopardy for 2020. It seems for youth sports there's a tenuous line between remaining closed and returning to play.

The Canadian Premier League is practicing ahead of a return to play and the NHL, NBA, MLS and MLB are all set to begin this month.