

Only game in town is the waiting one

‘Sports is a big part of the social fabric ... we don’t take that lightly,’ organizer says

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Douglas Park, like all sports facilities in Regina, remains empty and unused, as sports groups wait for the lifting of restrictions due to COVID-19.

Spring has sprung, but the same can't be said for outdoor sports in Regina.

All of the Queen City's sports fields, diamonds and athletic facilities have been closed since March 17 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The closures have impacted all of the sports groups that utilize those fields, pitches and diamonds scattered throughout Regina.

Instead of holding practices and games, the spring leagues and programs are playing a waiting game in hopes of eventually being cleared to take to the fields.

When that might happen remains to be determined. The provincial government included sports fields and facilities in the fourth stage of its five-phase plan to reopen Saskatchewan on Thursday, but a date was not provided.

“The unknown is when the season will start,” Baseball Regina president Rob Gartner said. “We’re confident that we’ll get a season in and we don’t want to cancel it. That would be really unfortunate if we had to do that and we’re coming up with contingency plans for different durations (of a season).”

“The impact has been great.” Baseball Regina felt the impact early when evaluations for its 11-and-under division were scheduled for the first weekend the citywide ban was instituted.

“We had to hit pause and proceed without evaluating those players,” Gartner said. “We’ll be drafting teams in a new way, so our drafts are being impacted and our evaluations as well.”

Baseball Regina follows guidelines established by Baseball Saskatchewan and Baseball Canada, which banned all activities associated with the game until mid-May.

Baseball Regina is keeping its options open in terms of postponing instead of cancelling the 2020 season.

“As a board, we’ve talked about how important this is to the community and not just for the players to compete, develop and socialize,” Gartner said. “It’s also the parents, the grandparents, the uncles and aunts who come to watch.

“Sports is a big part of the social fabric of the community and we don’t take that lightly. That’s why we’re working diligently to come up with a season of games and practices for everybody to get some normalcy back when this pandemic ends.”

The impact of the coronavirus was also felt at the community soccer level, with all four zones cancelling their outdoor seasons after discussions with health officials and Soccer Saskatchewan.

“Our registration has been open for months and our executive has been ready for months,” said Kurtis Krug, president of the Regina East Zone Youth Soccer Association. “Equipment pickup was all scheduled and our coaches’ training and soccer clinics were ready to rock. We have everything in place, but for the actual season.” A disappointing aspect of cancelling the season is approximately 1,000 kids in east Regina won’t be playing soccer this spring.

“Our league is truly a recreational one,” Krug said. “There isn’t a big emphasis on winning or losing. We try to balance the team in terms of ages and skill levels if we know them. We just wanted to have competitive games and we’ve lost all of that.”

FC Regina is like any other sports organization in that it is waiting for clearance to proceed with its outdoor soccer season. Soccer Saskatchewan and the Canadian Soccer Association are hoping that comes in mid-May.

“They are just waiting and seeing what happens if there will be an outdoor season or not,” said TJ Singh, FC Regina’s executive director. “It won’t be a regular season because our season was to start at the end of April.” Singh noted that the uncertainty has had an impact on registrations. Approximately 500 players have signed up for the youth division, compared to 750 in 2019. Adult registrations, which usually number between 1,900 and 2,100 players, are down to 600 this year.

“We know it’s because of coronavirus and it’s not because people don’t want to play,” Singh said. “We expect a 40-per-cent reduction because, even when it’s over, people may not be back to work.”

The board recognized that many of its members need to be active. With that in mind, they created the online Super-star Skills Training for players to follow while waiting for their seasons to begin.

“We wanted to do something personal with FC Regina athletes and coaches,” Singh said. “We got a good response and people are happy just to have something to do.”

Football Regina already has cancelled its spring league, which featured high school-aged players in grades 9, 10 and 11.

The under-16 selects program has already missed two training camps due to the pandemic and executive director Len Antonini expects a cancellation. A football camp for players from Grade 6 through Grade 8 also is on hold.

“It has hurt three of our major programs in the spring,” Antonini said. “We haven’t any income right now, but we are still accepting registrations for the fall.”

As far as keeping active, Antonini suggested players just get out and throw around a football.

“They can’t have a full game, but two or three guys can throw a football and just have fun,” Antonini said.

The Regina Minor Girls Softball League is hoping its season might start by May 15. At least, that’s the date for which Softball Saskatchewan is aiming.

“They are really hopeful of salvaging some sort of season, but we’re all in the same place,” said Regina Minor Softball executive director Kristina Kenny, whose association has approximately 1,250 girls on 84 teams.

“This is our livelihood. It’s a great sport and we don’t want to lose kids, either. So we’re optimistic and working hard and that’s why we’re going week to week.”

The Regina Ladies Softball Association is also following the Softball Saskatchewan guidelines and hoping for a May 15 start, which is 12 days after the league was scheduled to open.

“Until the suspension is lifted, we don’t have any insurance,” RLSA president Brenda Anderson said. “We have to get that lifted so we can play.”