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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 18, 2020

**Eagle County Schools opts to play football now**

*Practice to start 9/24 with first games to start 10/8*

**Eagle, CO** – The Eagle County School District announced today that they are choosing to play fall football during the A season this fall. This district has notified CHSAA, and CHSAA has indicated they will assist in the making of schedules for teams who opt-in on Monday, September 21, 2020. Several specific issues helped determine the district’s decision to play ball now instead of waiting until the previously proposed “C” schedule in the spring.

Managing COVID-19 is the primary focus of school district operations, including athletics. The district believes that its best window for low concentrations of COVID in the community is now before the ski season starts. The community has been very effective at complying with health and safety guidelines to keep COVID-19 manageable. Eagle County Schools is very grateful for ski tourism and hopeful for the fullest possible ski season participation. We also understand it becomes more challenging to manage viral spread as our population expands. The possibility of transitioning to remote learning may increase during the ski season, which would also stop sports happening at that time. Combined with the spring weather conditions, the fall season offers a better opportunity for student athletes to play football than spring.

Importantly, CHSAA is only allowing football, field hockey, and sideline spirit sports a variance to play now instead of during the C schedule. The focus helps the district offer football. It alleviates transportation issues that would happen if all of our regular sports were simultaneously happening now. Though it will be a challenge, the district has a plan for football transportation.

The focus on football also helps from a facilities perspective. By not sharing the fields with other field-sports, coaches and student athletes have more practice space and time.

Even though the focus helps us mitigate support challenges, we would have preferred to approve all regular fall sports, including soccer and volleyball. Unfortunately, variances for those other sports have not been approved.

We are still developing our plan around spectators. Naturally, we want as many fans as possible in the stands. But we must continue to practice the five commitments of containment. We are working with Public Health and other school districts that have implemented effective plans for fans. We will share an update as soon as our plan is finalized. Certain traditions among spectators are not likely to be possible this season. The district will need community cooperation around attendance restrictions to have any fans at games.

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Both high schools can simulcast the games for online viewing from home. Watching the games in this manner will be encouraged.

“We’re very excited to be able to play football this fall instead of the spring,” said Superintendent Philip Qualman. “Athletics are always important and an essential part of the total school experience, but we think the mental boost of playing sports now is more important than ever. The threat of interruptions due to COVID remains. Still, our community has demonstrated a willingness and the ability to respond appropriately as conditions change.”

Per CHSAA rules, practice can begin on September 24, 2020, with games starting on October 8, 2020. CHSAA will set the schedule among teams opting in on Monday, September 21, 2020.

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