

# Football

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Nearly every Morris County team has taken advantage, implementing an off-season training regimen.

Assistant director Bob Baly said the NJSIAA does not have jurisdiction over local schools until Aug. 13, when all fall sports are allowed to begin formal practice.

But voluntary workouts can begin as soon as school is out in June. Coaches can be there, though new guidelines issued in the spring discourage the use of pads. There are no limitations on camps or clinics, though the student-athletes are not allowed to represent their schools.

"We hope (coaches) would be very conscious of placing their kids in danger," said Baly, noting that the NJSIAA has implemented new health-related guidelines for preseason. "You're talking to an old-school guy, who believes kids should have more time off in the summer so they should have recreation. I'm not a believer in 12-month sport specialization."

## Getting in the game

Lenape Valley only began serious summer workouts a couple of years ago. The Patriots had spent previous off seasons in the weight room, and on a brief voluntary trip to a football camp. But a couple of years ago, they needed extra passing practice — and senior linebacker-fullback Mike Groome said, "The only way to do it was to start over the summer."

They were running and lifting together this year, showing a summertime commitment to the team that they hoped would carry over into on-field success in the ultra-competitive SCIL Conference.

"It can be exhausting, but at the same time it's fun," Groome added. "Everybody's got their minds already thinking football, even before regular preseason starts. We have everything fresh in our minds already. I don't know if it's helping us get an edge, or just keeping up with everyone. It's more just being at the same level as everyone else, not falling behind."

Don Smolyn, now in his 32nd year at the helm, was already at Lenape Valley when New Jersey fall practices didn't formally begin until Sept. 1. This

**"I've found you lose a lot of your productivity unless you can keep all your kids together. Anything you teach, you've got to teach again."**

— Mtn. Lakes head football coach Doug Wilkins



Mountain Lakes head coach Doug Wilkins guides Matt Dobrosky during summer practice last week.

JOHN BELL / DAILY RECORD

year, teams will play their first games Sept. 7 and 8 — the earliest in state history.

Mountain Lakes' summer practices are a throwback to that simpler time. Head coach Doug Wilkins prefers to "have the kids run the show."

Returning to the days of captains' practices, Wilkins and his staff are willing to step back and have less-frequent contact with their team. The Herd's 16 seniors formed four mixed groups of 20 to 25 teammates, and were then responsible for their performance. It gives the players "a sense of responsibility to the team" which Wilkins feels will pay off as Mountain Lakes tries to return to the North 1, Group 1 final.

Montville head coach Gerry Gallagher recalled his time playing at Morris Catholic in the late 1960s, when coaches were not permitted to work with their athletes. But they still told the captains what to work on, then watched through the windows on the top floor of the school.

Mountain Lakes' conditioning-centered program has more flexibility. Each athlete has to set goals for himself, and the group's mission is to help indi-



A Morris Catholic football player wipes the sweat from his eyes during summer workouts last week.

ASHLEY TWIGGS / DAILY RECORD

viduals achieve those goals. The team usually started the summer with a weekend retreat at Wilkins' vacation home at Beach Haven Terrace, but this year there were too many athletes with other commitments, such as summer baseball and lacrosse teams.

They stayed at the high school for two days of meetings, and while Wilkins said the traditional kickoff "lost a little of its flavor," the mission was still accomplished.

"I've found you lose a lot of your productivity unless you

can keep all your kids together," he added. "Anything you teach, you've got to teach again."

Morristown-Bear senior Michael Betz has learned that firsthand. A quarterback-linebacker from Mine Hill, Betz spent most of his summer as a pitcher and first baseman for the Mount Morris American Legion team. He's hoping to earn a college baseball scholarship and turned his focus toward that sport, skipping most of the Crimson's lifting sessions.

"I thought I was on the same level," said Betz, a first-team All-Area defensive back last fall. "I had to fight for my position (at linebacker), win it back. I had to prove myself, that I was better than the guy in front of me. I was a little upset at first, but I got over it. I realized I missed out."

## Protecting practice

There has been a renewed emphasis on safety and acclimatization to the weather this year, culminating in NJSIAA preseason guidelines that cut back on the number and length of practices. Morris Knolls head coach Bill Regan ensures there are plenty of water breaks and discusses proper diet and nutrition with his players.

The Golden Eagles concentrated on strength training in the summer, plus running, agility work and some position-specific skill development. Regan estimated that nearly all 22 Morris Knolls seniors had perfect attendance at the 32 summer workouts — five days a week from when school let out in June, with the freshman and sophomores going three times a week.

"We don't make a big deal about it," he said. "Guys who play ball know that's part of what's going on."

Perhaps, but not all states are as relaxed as New Jersey is.

After high school athletes began passing up high school teams in favor of AAU or other clubs, North Carolina was forced to change its stringent off-season rules and allow coaches to work with a limited number of players per sport — 21 in football — on individual skill development. Oregon permits contact between a coach and just two athletes at a time in the summer. Nevada cuts off coach-athlete contact two weeks before tryouts in every season.

"You're just chasing your tail trying to enforce coaches being around the kids," Nevada Interscholastic Activities Association executive director Eddie Bonine said, noting that recruiting and transfers are actually his biggest problem.

"If the coaches aren't there, they'll find a qualified parent to run it for them. There's this monster you'll find that's been created.

"They've got to keep up with everybody else."

But it is that very mentality which can lead to burnout in both athletes and coaches.

Utah has a mandatory 12-week dead period immediately following the high school football season, and allows just five days in pads from Memorial Day to July 17. The three weeks prior to the official start of practice on Aug. 6 are also off-limits. The North Dakota High School Activities Association is considering adding dead periods to its state calendar because, as assistant to the executive secretary Dave Carlsrud said, coaches "don't want all that flexibility. They're forced to do stuff."

Regan, Gallagher, and many other Morris County coaches agreed wholeheartedly. If the rest of the Iron Hills Conference-Iron Division is out there training in the heat, Morris Knolls has to do the same just to remain competitive. So does young Montville, fast-rising Morris Hills, and every other school — a cycle that seems unlikely to end with out new rules.

"I played football the whole summer," Scarlet Knights senior Doug Dudek said. "I just enjoy it. It's awesome."

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## The Wild and Wacky World of Summer Football Policies

A closer look at some of the more curious rules...

### North Dakota

Football coaches wanted more flexibility to run practices and hold summer workouts. The North Dakota High School Activities Association listened, and eight or nine years ago, opened up June and July.

But the coaches quickly realized they'd run into trouble — and a lack of downtime. The restrictive schedule "was providing them lives," said Dave Carlsrud, assistant to the executive secretary. "They don't want all that flexibility. They're forced to do stuff. The expectations of the parents and communities, they think coaches should be involved 12 months out of the year."

The North Dakota coaches' association is polling its members to find out its revised wishes, which the NDHSA will consider. And perhaps, the coaches and athletes might get their vacations back.

### Nevada

High schools in Nevada have very limited restrictions in the summer, with some even offering weight training as a half-credit course. The off-season has become a free for all, with coaches allowed to do practically anything until the final two weeks before tryouts are set to begin in the fall.

Though Nevada Interscholastic Activities Association executive director Eddie Bonine said that some baseball players could be involved in as many as 88 games before spring actually starts.

Not that all that extra work necessarily helps.

"I could hire a staff member that all they do is enforce out-of-season participation," Bonine added. "It'd be a full-time job in our state. ... But we've found out over time that no matter how often you practice or how long you practice, if you don't have the athletes you won't win anyway."

### Alaska

Football isn't a big deal in Alaska. The only state without intercollegiate football, about 24 of its 200 high schools field teams.

The reasons are simple: few fields, few players, and sometimes, few roads.

The vast majority of Alaskan football teams are located in south-central Alaska, from Fairbanks to Anchorage, which is on the road system. Yet even with fields available, about 120 of Alaska's high schools have under 50 students in the four grades — not nearly enough to put together offensive and defensive lines.

The schools that do have football got started early, to get the season in before everything freezes. Football and cross country, the two main fall sports, began practicing on July 30, with the first games scheduled for Aug. 10. By mid-October, Alaska is "under the snow blanket," according to Alaska School Activities Association director of special events John Andrews. He even recalls having to snowplow the fields to play state tournament games, which will be held on Oct. 13 and 20.

Much of the attention in Alaska has been focused on Barrow, which is building an artificial turf field to replace dirt and gravel. Grass can't even grow there.

Said Andrews, "Even the northern states like Minnesota and Michigan, when they have cold winters, they don't have it come on as soon as we do."

### Nebraska

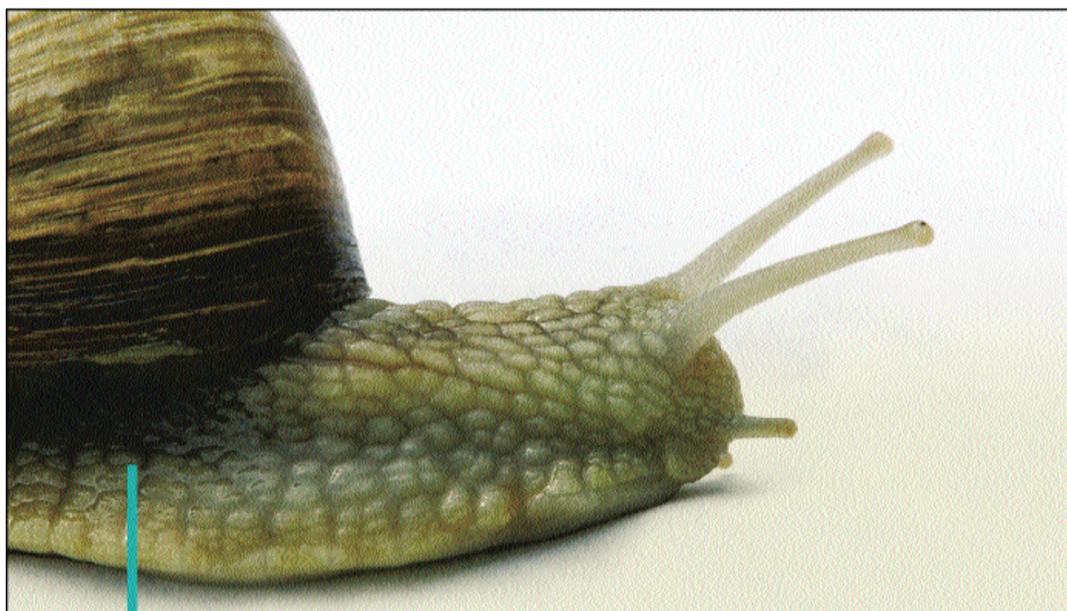
Though the University of Nebraska is a major football power, many of the high schools are small. About 28 schools have an enrollment of more than 1,000 students in grades nine, 10 and 11, according to Tom Millsap, the administrator for high school football at the Nebraska School Activities Association. Of the 310 schools playing football, 225 to 250 of those have fewer than 400 students, boys and girls combined. That leads to less specialization, and more multi-sport athletes — and fewer off-season workouts.

There is no spring football in Nebraska. Once the season ends around Nov. 20, coaches can work with just five individuals at a time for no more than one hour per day. Most also run a 10-day camp in late July, or go to a team camp run by a college.

— Compiled by Jane Havsy



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