

US HIGH SCHOOL FEDERATION CALLS FOR PITCH LIMITS IN 2017

RICHMOND: The National Federation of State High School Associations has directed its members to regulate the number of pitches a high school player can throw in a game amid growing concerns about overworking young arms.

The federation did not proscribe a specific number, but a limit must be established by next season, said Elliot Hopkins, the NFHS director of sports and student services. The limits will go into effect in the spring of 2017. Every state plus the District of Columbia are federation members, Hopkins said Tuesday. Each state except Michigan has its own sports medicine advisory committee that will likely be involved in settling on a specific number. "I think

they're better suited to determine what the number is," Hopkins said, noting the number in warmer climates, where baseball season starts earlier, might be higher.

States like Texas have already established their limit at 125 pitches, and Alabama, Colorado and Kentucky have said that will be their number, too, Hopkins said. Minnesota will use 105 during the season and 115 or 120 in playoffs.

Anecdotal evidence suggested it was time to make the change. As a member of the USA Baseball sports medicine advisory committee, Hopkins said he sits between well-known sports surgeon Dr. James Andrews and former major league pitcher Tommy John at meetings. Andrews in 1974

pioneered a surgery, first performed on and then named for Tommy John, that reconstructs the ulnar collateral ligament in a pitcher's elbow, allowing them to resume their careers after rehabilitation.

"During those meetings, Dr. Andrews always expressed how more and more of his service, and his surgeries, revolved around younger kids," Hopkins said. USA Baseball, the national governing body for amateur baseball, in 2014 launched the program "Pitch Smart," which sets age-appropriate guidelines for the number of pitches a pitcher as young as 7 can throw and the amount of rest they should get between pitching appearances. Most amateur baseball leagues have adopted the

guidelines, which set 120 pitches as the maximum recommended for pitchers ages 19-22. It then also requires they receive four days of rest.

One impact Hopkins hopes will come from the rule change will be the involvement of more players. "You have maybe three or four pitchers in your bullpen typically," he said. "Now, we'll get some kids who really can't throw five innings, can't give you five innings, but they can give you a solid two, and now you've got a bullpen and you get more kids involved."

The federation will no longer require its member associations to require a certain amount of rest between appearances by a pitcher. Virginia coach Brian O'Connor,

whose team won the national championship in 2015, called the changes "a step in the right direction" but was not sure a single pitch count number will have the desired effect.

"Somebody could throw 75 pitches three different times in a week," he said. "It's not a be all, end all," said Sean Ryan, a high school coach in Richmond whose team at Benedictine plays in the Virginia Independent Schools Athletic Association and will not be subjected to the federation rules. He noted that a young pitcher often moves to another position during a game, or in the team's next game, where he continues throwing in between innings and in the game. — AP



SCHEVENINGEN: Olympic and Paralympic teams pose for a family picture during their presentation in Scheveningen, yesterday. — AFP

USADA: REPORT COULD JUSTIFY RUSSIA'S EXCLUSION FROM RIO

NEW YORK: A report on Russian doping due out this week is expected to include details about the country's sports ministry telling its drug-testing officials which positive tests to report and which to conceal. If those details do, indeed, show up in the report, the leader of the US anti-doping effort says nothing short of removing the Russian flag from this summer's Olympics would suffice.

Travis Tygart, the CEO of the US Anti-Doping Agency, told The Associated Press he would support the same sort of action for all Russian sports that track's governing body, the IAAF, took regarding the country's track team: It barred the team but gave a small number of athletes who could prove they were clean a chance to compete under a neutral flag.

"If it's proven true, and there's been intentional subversion of the system by the Russian government ... the only outcome is they can't participate in these Olympic Games under that country's flag," Tygart said.

The World Anti-Doping Agency commissioned an investigation, being headed by Richard McLaren, into Russian doping following a New York Times story in May that detailed a state-run system that helped athletes get away with cheating and win medals at the Sochi Olympics in 2014. The McLaren report is due Friday, with public release set for next Monday.

An earlier investigation, headed by former WADA chairman Dick Pound, looked into Russian doping inside the track team; the McLaren investigation is expected to delve into all sports.

In June, based on information from Pound's report and its own follow-up, the IAAF barred Russia's track team from competing in the Olympics after deciding it had not moved aggressively enough on widespread reforms.

In announcing the decision, the IAAF issued a report that included preliminary findings from McLaren stating evidence showed a "mandatory state-directed manipulation of laboratory analytical results operating within" the Moscow anti-doping lab from at least 2011 through the summer of 2013.

The preliminary findings also said Russia's "Ministry of Sport advised the laboratory which of its adverse findings it could report to WADA, and which it had to cover up."

If those preliminary findings show up in the full report, and turn out to be just the tip of the iceberg, it would represent "an unprecedented level of criminality,"

Tygart said. Tygart previewed the findings to leaders of USA Track and Field at a meeting during Olympic Trials last weekend. There, Tygart said, "what we see now is what happened in East Germany" in the 1970s and '80s, when doping in the Eastern Bloc went virtually unchecked.

He told USATF leaders: "You have to send a message to states that corrupt the Games. I don't want to pre-judge the report but indications are that that's what's going to be in there."

USADA chairman Edwin Moses, the gold-medal-winning and world-record-setting hurdler from the 1970s and '80s, reiterated that point to the USATF.

"If an athlete is going to get sanctioned for two, four, eight years, then certainly the same should happen for any federation or agency or administrators who are involved," he said. Shortly after the Times report came out, International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach wrote an op-ed piece in USA Today saying that if allegations in the Times story were true, the IOC would "react with its record of proven zero-tolerance policy, not only with regard to individual athletes, but to all their entourage within its reach."

"Should there be evidence of an organized system contaminating other sports, the international federations and the IOC would have to make the difficult decision between collective responsibility and individual justice," Bach wrote.

On July 21, the Court of Arbitration for Sport will rule on the eligibility of 68 Russian track athletes who claim they should be able to compete despite the IAAF ban. Still undecided is whether the IOC will allow cleared Russian athletes to compete as neutral, or under the Russian flag.

If the McLaren report is as damning as expected, the IOC and international leaders in the 27 other Summer Olympic sports will have to come up with plans on similar issues on a limited timeframe.

Friday marks the three-week countdown to the Rio Games. Rich Bender, the executive director of USA Wrestling, said he had full confidence in the leadership of his sport's international federation to handle the situation correctly.

"The international federation has a significant responsibility to do everything in its power to make sure that happens," Bender said. "If you start making exceptions and compromising positions there, it weakens the statement that doping isn't tolerated." — AP

NUUAUSALA ITCHING FOR WIGAN DEBUT

LONDON: Wigan Warriors new signing Frank-Paul Nuuausala turned down St Helens - and the advice of his friend Sia Soliola - before joining the Super League leaders.

The New Zealand international was announced as Wigan's new signing - effective immediately - at the end of last month but had to wait for his visa application before being presented to the media on Tuesday. The 29-year-old - who won the NRL with the Sydney Roosters in 2013 and beat Wigan in the World Challenge in 2014 - joins on a three-and-a-half year deal after falling out of favour at Canberra Raiders.

And despite Soliola trying to convince the prop to join Saints, Nuuausala insists there was only ever one club he had in mind, their fierce local rivals Wigan.

"There was a bit of interest from (St Helens) but they just didn't pull through. It was just all talk," he said. "With Wigan it was all action. I just had to weigh up my options and decide what's best for me and my family."

"Sia wanted me to play for Saints and when

he found out I was going to sign for Wigan he was giving me some stick but I also got advice from Jeff Lima and Thomas Leuluai about Wigan and I'm 100 per cent happy I chose Wigan. "When I was a kid I remember seeing Frano Botica and Wigan were always on the telly because they were winning trophies."

Shaun Wane's side went first in the Super League table last week with their win over Wakefield but are still suffering from an injury crisis - Joel Tomkins the latest to be ruled out for the rest of the season. Wigan face Leeds in a Grand Final re-match on Friday but Nuuausala is reluctant to be thrown straight into the mix.

"I really do want to play but I know, if I'm not right, I'm not going to put my hand up and disrespect that jersey. I don't want to let anyone down in my first game," added Nuuausala.

"If I'm ready to play this week, I will but if not I'll definitely be ready to play next week." Huddersfield face St Helens on Sunday and the Giants have been boosted by the news Rick Stone - former head coach of the Newcastle

Knights - will soon be flying in to the rescue.

"Top jobs such as this one don't come around very often so I'm ready to go and really can't get there quick enough," said Stone - who was sacked last July.

"I know the club has some very short-term goals in terms of wins needed in whatever league structure we end up in after 23 rounds, but I've always believed that results tend to take care of themselves if you work hard, prepare well and commit to your team-mates which are key parts of my coaching style." The Giants were beaten last time out by Hull KR who will welcome their local rivals Hull FC this weekend.

And Rovers assistant coach Willie Poching admits his side are giving their all for a Super 8s spot - despite needing a perfect finish to the season and other results to go their way.

"Benny Cockayne and many others gave it their all against Huddersfield," Poching said. "George Lawler, Iain Thornley and Dane Tilse along with others, they just kept carrying the ball whilst out on their feet." — AFP

JUDO HEAVYWEIGHT IDALIS ORTIZ AIMS FOR GOLDEN REPEAT IN RIO

HAVANA: Top Cuban judoka Idalis Ortiz forged her exceptional endurance and techniques by training with men-a regimen that helped her break through in Beijing and claim Olympic gold in London. Now, she is setting her sights on a golden repeat in Rio next month. Born in the little village of Candelaria, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) outside of Havana, the smiling Ortiz learned to fall-and always to get back up-opposite male sparing partners.

They were the only ones who could cope with the extraordinary physique of the 26-year-old woman, who stands 5'8" (1.73 meters) and weighs 250 pounds (115 kilos).

The method payed off, as at just 18 years old, Ortiz claimed the bronze in Beijing, the youngest medalist in the heavyweight category. Four years later, she broke the Chinese and Japanese chokehold on the sport in London with her victory. By stealing the spotlight from the favorites, China's Tong Wen and Japan's Mika Sugimoto, Ortiz became the first judoka born outside Asia to dominate in the category at the Olympics, which first held women's judo competitions in 1992. In Rio, things will be different, she said, because the field is more even. "Whoever my opponent may be, it will be difficult," Ortiz predicted in an interview with AFP at the Cerro

Pelado training center south of Havana. The hopes of an entire nation rest on Ortiz, the most prominent competitor in a sport that brought 35 Olympic medals to the Caribbean island from 1964-2012. To reach the top of the podium in Rio next month, Ortiz will likely have to get past world number one Song Yu of China and Brazil's Maria Altheman, Ortiz's long-suffering foil who will likely be thirsty for revenge on home turf.

FALLING AND FALLING AGAIN

The Cuban, who often has highlights in her hair, told AFP she is still eager to win titles even after taking home some 200 medals over the course of her career, including five from world championships-two gold and three bronze.

After Rio, Ortiz-a fan of Mexican movies and Brazilian telenovelas that "make you cry"-says she wants to live out another dream. "I want to take a break to start a family but I have no intention of giving up judo," she said of her 12-year relationship with a Cuban former weightlifter. For the time being, Ortiz is training hard, seven hours a day-and, as she did at the start of her career, with men. "I've always been fairly big, and there weren't any girls to take me on. I've always had to spar with men in

training," she said. "You can't imagine how many times they took me down but losing made me stronger mentally," she added.

WINNING BY TURNS

Drilus Gonzalez, a Cuban female judo star who trains the national team, is full of praise for Ortiz. "Since she joined the national team, she's shown maturity, character and self-sacrifice. This, along with her discipline and talent, give her a winning mindset," she said. Ortiz's love affair with judo began at an early age. But everything changed when she was 14 - the moment when she arrived at the elite national training center in Havana. When she showed up for tryouts, Ortiz says that her sister was bowled over by the size of her adversaries and asked her if she truly wanted to stay. "I told her, 'So long as I'm here, I'll keep going...and after the bouts, the teacher said, 'The little one stays here.'" And for 12 years since that time, the champion has only ever gone home to visit. During major international events, Ortiz's entire family is overcome with nerves but cannot travel with her due to the cost. "My parents have never had the courage to watch me spar in person. My brothers have watched but not my parents," the champion says with a smile before heading back to the tatami mat. — AFP