

 **SPECIAL FEATURE**

January 30, 2026

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SportsTone.net

ASHEBORO - High School coaches and administration can prepare for many different aspects of their particular sport. They can adjust to schemes, they can adjust to injuries, they can adjust to a tough portion of the schedule and they can adjust to playing on a particular day or at a particular time they are unaccustomed to.

Perhaps the hardest of all adjustments for coaches and athletic directors are the adjustments caused by the weather. There is no preparation and everything is decided on the fly because there is no book to follow when Mother Nature is involved.

The snow, rain, ice and freezing temperatures Randolph County has experienced for more than a week has left coaches and athletic directors in a quandary. Games are postponed, scheduled, postponed again, scheduled, postponed again ... It's a never-ending cycle that quickly becomes very frustrating.

"It's hectic in the sense that it's so unique being an athletic director rather than a coach in knowing things are going to have to move and it's hard to say we're moving it, but we don't know where," Uwharrie Charter Academy Athletic Director David Hayes said. "The one good thing about this weather, it's affected all of us (in the Four Rivers Conference). No one team is going to be fresh while someone has to play eight million games in a row. It's definitely frustrating, but we have a great group of athletic directors."

Teams started making adjustments Jan. 22 for the first ice/snow storm that was expected to hit Randolph County Jan. 24 and 25. A couple of schools moved their Jan. 23 games to Jan. 22, while others were fortunate to play those games on the 23rd. The rain, snow and ice didn't hit Randolph County until Saturday, Jan. 24. But that storm caused schools in Randolph County, Asheboro City, Uwharrie Charter Academy School System and neighboring school systems to postpone games and events from last Monday through the entire week. And now there's a forecast of another storm coming this weekend which could prove havoc for next week's schedule.

"That's one of the things about talking to other ADs and people at the county office, I think we are all on the same page," Hayes said. "It's important to play these games and we need to play these games, but it's not worth the risk. We have students who drive to these games and it is not worth getting anyone injured."

Randleman High School AD Jake Smith said there's nothing anyone can do about the weather, but it is frustrating.

"It's frustrating for coaches and players who are trying to get into a routine and this just backs everything up," Smith said, adding that the possibility of canceling the Piedmont Athletic Conference Basketball Tournament could be in sight.

Smith also pointed out that once the basketball season resumes, teams will be rescheduling the postponed games and referees will be in short supply. Referees are already in short supply even without scheduling problems.

"It is going to be tough, because I am sure they are going to want to get everything in as soon as they can," said Scott Faglier, the Regional Supervisor of the Mid-State Referees Association. "They will have a high priority on our side. We will get it done one way or another."

Faglier, who said he oversees about 100 officials for 300 schools, said days that referees have blacked out on the schedule may have to be changed.

"Guys want to officiate as badly as coaches, players and fans want to play," Faglier said. "It's a good group of guys."

Each conference may find scheduling tough. The PAC features five different school systems - Randolph County, Guilford County, Montgomery County, Davidson County and Lexington City - which means the possibility of one or two schools being able to play earlier than others could occur. Smith did say there has been one positive from the school closings.

"You don't get a lot of time to spend with your family during a school year and getting to play with them and do things is nice," Smith said. "And I got pretty much every schedule done so when we come back to school next fall that's taken care of."

Asheboro High School Athletic Director Wes Berrier is experiencing the same problems other ADs are having.

"Miserable," he said. "Now you start messing with the end of the season tournaments. We really don't want to do that. Our money-maker for the conference is the basketball tournament. Every conference is new. Everyone is trying to generate money and if we don't have the basketball tournament, it will be a slow year for revenue in the conference."

Revenue from the tournaments aid in paying for officials, certificates, plaques, trophies and other items needed.

"I can see us going in the hole the first year if we don't have a tournament," Berrier said, adding that if needed, he hoped the state steps in and allows for an extra week of competition like it did with the Hurricane Helene situation."

Southwestern Randolph High School AD and boys basketball coach Matt Kiser has been hit on both the administration and coaching sides.

"Hectic, frustrating," Kiser said. "It's beyond anyone's control. You hate constantly moving things, rescheduling. I don't know what's worse in this situation, being an athletic director or being an athletic director and a coach."

Kiser said there are a number of safety issues involved. One is traveling. No one wants to see a bus load of student-athletes and coaches or fans have to travel in difficult conditions. This includes an inclement weather forecast for that night.

But there is another safety concern that has nothing to do with traveling.

"Player safety," Kiser said. "You have to do what's best for the kids. My players haven't been on a court for six or seven days. Is it best for them to go out tomorrow and compete? You have to be concerned about player safety."