

# CAUGHT in the FRAY OVER THE DELAY TO PLAY

Rally unites athletes in support of return to athletics during COVID-19

Having my last year ripped away hurts a lot. It would do anything to get a season, not only for me, but for every athlete just like me," Gunnar Vidauri said.

The question of whether to resume sports had been a question plaguing California officials for nine months, and at 4 p.m. Jan. 15, nearly 2,000 rallies up and down the state simultaneously drew attention as crowds advocated for allowing athletic seasons to begin. One of these rallies took place in the parking lot between Destiny Church and Scandinavian Designs.

Student-athletes arrived



"Kids have been suffering the most mentally and physically through this whole pandemic and sports is a big way for most of us to start getting better." BRAYDEN GOULARTE

with parents, siblings and friends to support a return to sports, gathering in the parking lot at a stage constructed against a backdrop of green ivy.

"I play water polo and am varsity captain this year, and I have worked so hard to have my senior season. We've been training since June for this season. I know myself and the rest of my teammates would do anything to get to play [together] one last time," Kailee Hamilton said.

Open to anyone and spread mostly through social media, the event drew a mainly-senior audience with heavy parent support.

"I don't even know exactly how it happened, but all of a sudden I was leading the efforts for Rocklin, and then in chatting with different people, we decided to pull together in a

coordinated effort." Mrs. Tina Watts, the mother of two high school athletes at Rocklin and the organizer of the rally, said. "Obviously, we compete against one another — everyone's got their rivalries, but at the end of the day, we're in this together as a community."

Despite the positive vibe, others were wary of the message it sent. Sydney Johnson, a recruited senior who competed in track and field, also looked forward to the return of sports, but said the rally was not helpful in making that happen.

"Overall, the main goal is to get back to normal life as quickly as possible, as I'm sure we are all tired of the constant unpredictability and stress this global pandemic has produced," Johnson said. "But we all need to recognize,

despite our own desires to get back onto the field or court, that this is a serious health crisis and lives are on the line in our very own community."

Natalie Hogenboom shared these concerns. She said she realized the rally would be criticized but chose to attend because of what it supported.

"I understood the backlash that [attending] would receive, and I was definitely right about that. In the end, however, I did

not go because I'm carefree. COVID has affected me in many ways, and I am aware of the severity of the situation. I went because I personally already have a start date for my sport [swim]. It bothered me because I feel I have an advantage while other athletes are being robbed. It is unfair," Hogenboom said.

Those who attended hoped to create tangible change.

Watts said, "At the end of the day, the rally was not just a cheerleading session. It was to actually make a difference and to get our platform noticed for what we're trying to accomplish. We wanted to get the data and evidence in front of the people who make the decisions, which would be [Gov.] Gavin Newsom and the California Department of Public Health."



5 As one of six student-athletes to speak at the event, Nick Townley addresses the crowd. "There is a very low chance of catching COVID-19 through sports if all protocols are followed, so there's no reason we can't work together to have a season in a way that works to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and allows athletes to have a year with sports," Townley said.



1 Students hold up their homemade signs as a news camera pans across the rally attendees. There were multiple news sources covering the event, including the SoCalBe and Gold Country Media.

2 In the crowd, Jenna Kraft cheers. Having already missed her volleyball season, she didn't want her brother to lose the chance to play football his senior year. "Sports are important because for a lot of kids they are stress relievers, outlets from trouble at home, and are good for our bodies," Kraft said.

3 The poster presents data collected by the Golden State High School Football Coaches Community. They tracked California football teams who were working out with precautions in place, as well as data from other states across the country who played sports. They then gathered this information in a graphic to use as evidence to advocate for returning to sports.

4 A little boy helps his brother hold up a sign. Many attendees brought signs that displayed a variety of things such as puns, facts, and slogans that supported playing sports.

6 As one of the organizers of the event, Mr. Rich Watts speaks to the crowd about data collected supporting the return to high school sports. His wife, Mrs. Tina Watts, organized the rally three days prior with a group of helpers who found a stage, got the word out through social media and invited guest speakers.

WHAT  
actually  
HAPPENED

2020

MARCH 10

Study hall, banquets, learn pictures, practices and games are all suspended until at least April 12.

Practices and games continue as scheduled, however, spectators are limited to immediate family.

MARCH 13

CF cancels all Spring Sectional, Regional, and State Championship events due to the announcement that all public schools are to remain closed.

APRIL 3

Training is allowed to begin as long as proper precautions are put into place.

JUNE 16

JULY 20

Season 1 is pushed back until at least Jan 1 and state and regional championships are removed for winter sports.

The two-season schedule is released and bylaws 600-605 are suspended meaning athletes can play both club and high school sports.

DEC 1

DEC 14

Rallies took place across California to support the "Let Them Play" movement.

Competitors are postponed until Jan 23 and the ability to play different sports is tied to the color tiers determined by COVID-19 in each county.

2021  
JAN 15



Instead of going to Dallas for a soccer tournament, we stayed home because it got cancelled.  
SOTIA MCMASTER

BY A. BIVIER