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In tough times, sports a site to see (for now)

Good day, friends.
What a wild year this has turned out to be. Our country has gone through an epic time in its history, enduring a pandemic that all of us hope is over very soon.

In the first few months, I know for a lot of people like myself, the spectacle of no sports to watch (other than classic throwback games where you already knew the result) was difficult to understand and deal with.

We're kind of spoiled, to be honest, with so many sports we expect to watch or have the opportunity to tune into. Not having those at the palm of our hands for a couple months was a very weird and demanding process for all of us that love to stay up to date on the latest sports banter.

But, as time progressed, leagues such as the NBA, NHL, MLB and NFL, to name a few, made successful returns. The returns weren't all sunshine and rainbows, as I felt the MLB was going to shutdown after the Miami Marlins COVID-19 outbreak.

The NBA and NHL ran their bubble scenarios perfectly, with minimal cases reported from the respective locations. And the NFL continues to flow through games – although the pandemic has caused some schedule changes, including a Tuesday night football game that many of us WNYers probably don't care to talk much about anymore. In fact, as I write this, I'm prepping to watch a Wednesday NFL game!?! What a world we live in.

One thing that I miss – and I'm



sure many others do to – is being able to sit in the stands and cheer on a team.

I've gone to many MLB games during my nearly 25 years of life. Other than my early years, this past summer was my first without attending a game. Obviously, it was an impossible thing to do (unless I would've ponied up some money to travel to Texas for a World Series game, which was never in my mind to do.)

Most of you readers may know me or recognize my name from my past articles with Niagara Frontier Publications or the Niagara Gazette. If you follow me, you know I love to go out and cover sporting events – specifically high school sports.

Fall sports were slim pickings for me this year, but I got out to a fair share of cross country, golf and soccer events.

At each event, it felt incredible to see sports in front of my face – but it also had this eerie sense to it.

No student sections, no pep bands, "X'd" off areas to sit in, players wearing masks during competition in certain cases; hell, one event I almost wasn't allowed into,

because they had the wrong name on the media list of attendees!

While I completely understand and agree with why all of these precautions were thrown into place, it obviously took away from the entire game-day experience – an experience I miss dearly.

Next up is one of my favorites, the winter sports season ... well, maybe.

This winter – it's not looking good. Cases are on the rise and, until a vaccine is ready, it's very tough to see an end in sight.

The worst part is, there is nothing better than sectional basketball playoffs when they come around February and March. The atmosphere and intensity of games are second to none and just a spectacle to see. The thought of a year without all that is tough to wrap my mind around. And some may say, "Oh, it's just a high school game." If you don't believe me, go out and watch your local high school play a game. The students, fans, staff, parents and teams get into and invest a lot of devotion to it. When it all combines together, there is nothing better.

I feel for the seniors who are looking forward to having a final season and not knowing if that may happen. To be blunt, if I was a senior and knew my last season was being taken away, I'd be ticked off. These kids put in years of hard work, determination and effort to represent their schools, and for a year to be taken away is a shot to the heart. Some of these kids may never play the sport again following

their senior year.

2020 had the potential to be a big year for high school sports but it has turned into a puzzle that was almost finished, then thrown onto the floor.

The fact of the matter is, if we want to get back in the stands and see our teams live in person, it falls on us. We need to do our part to stop the spread of this disease.

It's a lot for some to comprehend, but it requires thinking more about others and less about ourselves and our wants in life.

If you do your part to keep others safe, you will also, in turn, protect yourself.

Thanksgiving was tough this year. Usually, I attend two dinners – my family's and my girlfriend's family. This year that didn't happen due to the pandemic and us putting safety first. Despite all that, my holiday weekend consisted of staying home and watching football. As tough as it was to want to go out and get food with friends or go shopping, I couldn't wrap my head around going out and being around a large group of people.

Staying home might not be easy for some, but it's the best thing we can do as people.

Granted, it might be a long shot at this point with cases rising, but if we want to continue to see sports – with our fine local athletes taking the field and hitting the hardwood – and get back into the stands, we need to do our parts.

In these times, protect yourself, think of others, and be safe.

Stay masked and be well.

Niagara County Health Department offers 'key actions to take if you test positive for COVID-19'

As cases continue to rise in Niagara County and surrounding areas, the Department of Health is asking the community to remain vigilant and play an important part in reducing community transmission of COVID-19 if testing positive.

"The number of cases each day are the highest we have seen in Niagara County since the start of the pandemic," stated Daniel Stapleton, public health director. "Our contact tracers are working through an unprecedented amount of cases and we need the public's help in ensuring a reduction in community spread."

The NCDOH has added more staff, trained existing staff in contact tracing, and shared contact tracing tasks with the New York State Department of Health. However, even with those measures, there is a delay between when some people find out they have a positive COVID-19 test result, when they are contacted to be informed of isolation expecta-

tions, and when close contacts are notified of their need to quarantine.

Individuals who have been told of a positive COVID-19 test result by their physician, pharmacy, health care facility or laboratory must isolate for 10 days past the onset of symptoms, or 10 days past the date of their positive test sample collection (if no symptoms).

Key actions to take if you test positive for COVID-19 (Isolation):

- Monitor your symptoms. If you have an emergency warning sign, seek emergency medical care immediately.
- Stay in a separate room from other household members, if possible.
- Use a separate bathroom, if possible.
- Avoid contact with other members of the household, including pets.
- Don't share personal household items, like cups, towels or utensils.
- Wear a mask when around other

people, if you are able to do so.

Close contacts and household members of an individual with a positive test result must quarantine for 14 days past the last date of exposure. Close contacts of a confirmed positive case should get tested for COVID-19. A negative diagnostic COVID-19 test does not end or shorten the quarantine period. Visit the NCDOH website for a list of COVID-19 test sites: <https://www.niagaracounty.com/health/Services/Public-Health-Preparedness/2019-Novel-Coronavirus-COVID-19>.

Key actions to take if you have been in close contact with a confirmed case (quarantine):

- Stay home for 14 days after your last contact with a person who has COVID-19.
- Watch for fever (100°F), cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms of COVID-19.
- If possible, stay away from others, especially people who are at

higher risk for getting very sick from COVID-19

"Isolation and quarantine are long-standing evidence-based tools that aid in reducing community spread by separating an individual from other people during a time when they could transmit disease," Stapleton said. "The NCDOH, in partnership with the community, can reduce community transmission of COVID-19 by working together."

Call your primary care provider with questions about your own health and for advice on managing symptoms. If you are having trouble breathing or are experiencing severe symptoms, call 9-1-1 and inform them that you are in isolation or quarantine for COVID-19.

For more regarding isolation and/or quarantine, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/isolation.html>, or call the Niagara County Department of Health nursing division at 278-1900.

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