

# High school baseball, softball umpires feel the loss of spring season in many ways

[Nick Gantaifis](#), NorthJersey.com Published 4:04 a.m. ET March 27, 2020 | Updated 12:18 p.m. ET March 27, 2020

By late March, John Gojdycz's schedule would usually be booked for the next three months. Most years, he would even have plans set for the following year too.

But for the first time in 38 years, the high school-certified umpire stares at his blank calendar and wonders what his next few months hold.

"No one has experienced anything like this. Normally my schedule's booked six days a week with assignments," said Gojdycz, who has served as secretary for the Bergen County Umpires Association for the last 12 years.

"We all feel for the athletes out there and what they're missing, especially the seniors. We're praying that we can all get back on the field and salvage some of the spring season."

Gojdycz, who primarily officiates NJSIAA-sanctioned high school baseball and softball games throughout North Jersey, is one of many umpires across the country experiencing the fallout from a postponed spring season.

The spring season remains in limbo with the [state-wide shutdown of schools due to the coronavirus pandemic](#). Extracurricular activities, including team practices, games and scrimmages are canceled until schools reopen.

The lacrosse season was scheduled to begin Wednesday, and baseball, softball, track, golf, boys tennis and boys volleyball were scheduled to open April 1.

[There's still hope for a spring sports season](#), but it certainly won't start for several weeks with schools closed across the state.

A release from the NJSIAA on March 16 said the organization "will make every effort to take advantage of whatever part of the spring sports season remains, including holding championships."



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Ridgewood vs. St. Joseph in the Bergen County baseball tournament championship game on Saturday, May 25, 2019. RW pitcher SJ #19 Anthony Panissidi is save at home as RW #10 pitcher Matt Crawford tries to get the out. (Photo: Michael Karas/NorthJersey.com)

One of the top NJSIAA-certified softball umpires in New Jersey, Gojdycz has called several big games and championship contests over the years, including the annual Tournament of Champions played at Ivy Hill Park on the campus of Seton Hall University the first week of June.

“Most of us call games because we love the game and enjoy being around the athletes,” said Gojdycz, who works full-time as a teacher coordinator in the Passaic school system. “When you factor the time and hours we put in compared to what we get paid, you realize it’s not about the money, but more for the love of the game and the opportunity to see the athletes grow and develop.”

Though umpiring is a secondary job and source of income for most officials, there is a financial fallout as a result of a postponed season.



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NV/Demarest #2 Emily Taylor slides on home base High school softball game between NV/Demarest and Ramsey (Photo: Viorel Florescu/NorthJersey.com)

The going rate for umpiring a high school varsity game in New Jersey is \$83 per outing. Multiply that by six games a week, and an entire spring season and an umpire could conceivably lose a few thousand dollars of secondary income.

"For some umpires this is a big source of income, especially the retired guys who count on this income at this time of the year," said Michael Johnstone, a Riverdale resident who primarily umpires youth baseball games, including Little League and Babe Ruth level games.

"My schedule is not as structured as high school umpires as it's more on-the-fly since the schedule is constantly changing with weather and cancellations. My busy time starts in mid-March and carries all the way through the summer."

Johnstone, who works full-time as a behavioral assistant working with adults and students born with autism, suspected that the spring sports season was going to be postponed after hearing that the NCAA canceled its championship events and Major League Baseball postponed Opening Day.

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Two weeks ago, Johnstone and hundreds of other colleagues learned that the annual Cooperstown Dreams Park experience was canceled for the 2020 season. The annual event, which runs for 13 weeks and draws thousands of 12-year-old eligible baseball players throughout the country every summer, serves as a rite of passage before youth players graduate to the big field.

“For the last 10 years, I’ve worked two separate weeks every summer in Cooperstown,” Johnstone said. “It’s a working vacation for me and other fellow umpires. It’s an expense for most families for their children to participate in Cooperstown and there’s so much advance planning and fundraising. I feel badly for those who are going to miss that experience.”



Cooperstown Dreams Park (Photo: ALL STAR IMAGING)

Fred Wagner, founder of the Baseball Umpires of River Vale, a local Bergen County-based chapter comprised of about 50 umpires, started umpiring baseball games full time after he and his wife took an early retirement a few years ago.

Like most of his colleagues, Wagner is hoping for some good news in the coming weeks.

“Umpiring is more of a hobby for me,” Wagner said. “Our last meeting was March 12, when we normally review rules before the season starts. But our next two scheduled meetings are canceled and we’re not scheduled to meet again until May 13.”

On Wednesday, [the NJSIAA issued a statement saying it still hopes to have a spring scholastic sports season of some sort](#). It’s assumed that the town and recreation administrators will follow the state’s recommendation as well. It all depends if and when students are allowed to return to school this year.

In the meantime, umpires throughout the state are taking a wait-and-see approach like everyone else.

“We all want to be back on the field and get back to the game we love,” Gojdycz said. “It’s always been about the kids and always will be.”