

HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

# Can't go to high school game because of COVID? Watch from home with help from robot.

BY **JARED PECK** SEPTEMBER 22, 2020 07:22 AM



PrepSpin performed its live play-by-play broadcast near the press box at the Frederick Douglass-North Hardin football game on Sept. 11, 2020. BY **MARCUS DORSEY**



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Fans of Fayette County's public high school sports teams will be able to see more games streamed live via a subscription service as they join the [NFHS Network](#) and its campaign to stream thousands of events across the country.

But the deal could make it more difficult for Central Kentucky's high school



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be on the network. Schools can choose to install them themselves or pay an installation fee. Tackett sits on the NFHS board of directors.

“I continue to say, ‘I do not know why people charge Grandma at the gate, and don’t charge Uncle Joe to watch it online,’” Tackett said. “The free streaming is a lost business opportunity for schools and at a time when your gate revenue’s going to be down.”

William Warfield, founder and owner of PrepSpin.com, from left, analyst Mike Meighan, and play-by-play commentator Gary Ball prepared for their broadcast of the Frederick Douglass-North Hardin



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the week all season. Above them, at top, is Douglass's new Pixellot camera that also streamed the game on the NFHS Network. Alex Slitz [ASLITZ@HERALD-LEADER.COM](mailto:ASLITZ@HERALD-LEADER.COM)

## PRESPIN IMPACT

Fayette's move online means there could be less of an opportunity for local free streamer [PrepSpin.com](http://PrepSpin.com) and founder William Warfield to come onto Fayette campuses for football, soccer, volleyball and basketball, Warfield said.

Warfield and Frederick Douglass were able to work out an agreement for PrepSpin to stream the North Hardin-Douglass game Sept. 11 on his YouTube channel and Douglass's NFHS feed, so the door is not completely closed, but Warfield believes that might have been a one-time deal.

"It's a sad day (for his company)," Warfield told the Herald-Leader after he got the news his access for those sports might be limited for the next five years as Fayette gets its bearings and protects its product on the NFHS Network. "We've dedicated our lives to covering high school sports in Central Kentucky here, and Fayette County's been a big part of that. I just hate it for the kids that all those extra news clips and things like that we've always submitted to get them national exposure on 'SportsCenter' is not going to be able to happen anymore in Fayette County."

Last year, a [PrepSpin.com highlight of Dane Key's one-handed grab](#) in the end zone for Douglass made the ESPN "SportsCenter" Top 10 highlights. It was one of dozens of plays Warfield has submitted over the years.

"I can't argue with it," Gary Ball said of the NFHS service. Ball serves as the play-by-play voice of PrepSpin on its "Game of the Week" and is also the producer and



coverage. They can at least watch a robot camera go back and forth on their field. For volleyball and soccer and all that I understand.”

PrepSpin’s “Game of the Week,” which Ball does with Warfield and Coach Mike Meighan as a broadcast team, raises the streaming level up a notch, they say, with its commentary and ability to do instant replay and postgame interviews. PrepSpin has not covered Fayette sports in the volume now available by the NFHS Network but it has covered various basketball, soccer and volleyball events on Fayette campuses regularly over the years.

Fayette County officials did not respond to questions about their relationship with PrepSpin going forward.

Warfield built PrepSpin.com from scratch after initially providing play-by-play audio for East and West Jessamine basketball games as sort of a hobby in his time off from RadioShack back in 2007. He quickly saw the potential and demand for live-streamed video of high school sports.

Warfield’s business model includes garnering sponsorships for his streamed games and this year he entered into a partnership agreement with Mingua Beef Jerky to help grow the company and continue providing free live streaming of regular-season high school events.

Warfield annually produces the video stream for the KHSAA’s state championships in football, boys’ and girls’ basketball, volleyball, baseball and softball and select games at the small-school All “A” Classic boys’ and girls’ basketball tournaments. And he has run the Lexington Legends’ minor league baseball live video stream for several years.



Warfield said he welcomes more streaming and loves that more games are online via the NFHS Network. But he's hopeful a deal for future Fayette games on his platform can be worked out.

Until then, PrepSpin continues to cover all Lexington Catholic and Lexington Christian home games and will be looking for other opportunities to stream around Central Kentucky, he said.

A robot camera was mounted near the press box at Great Crossing High School's Birds Nest Football Field in Georgetown. The camera adjusts to the action and live streams games automatically based



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The revenue that Warfield taps into, as Tackett noted, is an opportunity for schools.

While the NFHS Network keeps 90 percent of subscription fees, the real opportunity for revenue for schools could come from advertising on the stream, said network CEO Mark Koski.

“They receive 100 percent of the advertising that they put onto their games,” Koski told the Herald-Leader. “And so, you know, all the advertising that they want to sell — they can put logos on the screen and they can have a play-by-play announcer read 30-second spots — those type of things all go back to the school.”

In Scott County, where sports from its two high schools are on the NFHS Network, its athletics sponsors pay for a package that includes logos on its stream as well as signage in its venues, said district athletics director Daniel T. Wells.



Scott County also partners with the Georgetown News-Graphic for in-game commentary that goes out over the video stream and is audio streamed for free over the newspaper's website.

It is unclear how Fayette County schools will tap those opportunities in these early stages of getting their games online. School officials have not responded to questions about those ideas.

The NFHS Network began as a way to stream all kinds of school events, from music, drama and band to debates and sports, Koski said. And some schools use the sports stream to do their own student produced play-by-play events, a model he hopes more schools will pursue.

“A perfect model for us would be where a student calls the play-by-play and is a part of the action,” Koski said. “Maybe it’s someone who loves high school sports and is not part of the team, but now they can be part of the action.”

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