

LHSAA alters format for state basketball tournaments

The Louisiana High School Athletic Association is splitting the state championship basketball tournaments among three sites, with Burton Coliseum receiving half of the girls semifinals, half of the boys semifinals and all of the boys championship games.

The other half of the boys semifinal games will be played at the Cajundome in Lafayette. The other half of the girls semifinal games will be played at Southeastern Louisiana's University Center in Hammond, as will every girls championship game.

Girls semifinal games will be played March 1-3, followed by the championship games March 4-6.

Boys semifinals will be played March 8-10, with the finals March 11-13. Four games will be played at each site per day starting at noon. Other games will be scheduled at 2:30 p.m., 5 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Select (private) and non-select schools (public) will participate in the tournaments this season. Last year, select schools played their semifinals and finals on campus sites.

Eric Zartler, sales director at Visit Lake Charles, said the changes were made with safety in mind. The longer break between games will allow arenas to be emptied and cleaned between games. The changes should also help make sure most of the fans at each game are fans of one of the participating teams.

"I think it allows us to continue playing safely under current COVID restrictions," he said. "It also gives us the opportunity to host some girls games that we didn't have. I am excited about the opportunity to hopefully see some of our local teams participate in the semifinals and win a chance to go to Hammond.

"We are not losing anything. We lost 12 games on the boys side but gained 12 boys games.

"We are excited about the opportunity. Four games per day and 2½ hours between games gives us the opportunity to do things safely under the governor's guidelines.

"McNeese State moved its game with Nicholls State from March 3 to March 4 to help with the new schedule."

Zartler said fans will have their temperature checked at the door and social distancing will be encouraged. Attendance will be limited to 1,550 fans per game at Burton Coliseum.

The semifinals will be grouped by class/division, with the two semifinals of each class/division played back-to-back at the same site. Each team will have two days off between the semifinals and final.