

Coronavirus Fears in Jamaica Trigger Suggestion That School Championships Sports Games be Held Without Fans

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KINGSTON, Jamaica, CMC – A recommendation has come from the Jamaica Athletics Administrative Association (JAAA) that the schools' athletics championships scheduled for later this month should be closed to spectators, as fears about the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) throw major sporting events across the globe in doubt.

Several international sporting organizations have made a decision that events that continue as planned, including the European Champions and Europa Cups, will do so without any audiences; while others have been postponed.

On Monday, the Greek Olympic Committee announced that the Olympic Flame lighting ceremony for this summer's Tokyo Games will be held without spectators, due to the COVID-19 outbreak. It said only 100 accredited guests from the International Olympic Committee and the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee will be allowed to attend Thursday's event in Olympia.

In an interview with the Jamaica Observer on Monday, JAAA President Dr Warren Blake said the Inter-Secondary Schools Sports Association (ISSA) should considering following suit for the March 24-28 national high schools Boy and Girls' Athletics Championships at the National Stadium.

The medical practitioner told the newspaper that given the rapid spread of the influenza-type virus that can be transmitted via person-to-person contact, and the lack of exhaustive testing by health authorities in the United States — from where a number of fans are expected to travel for the championships — it would be best for organizers to err on the side of caution.

“I am just saying we should keep an eye on what is going on.... If it becomes a situation of a public health concern and you cannot put a crowd together [without a threat], then there is the possibility of having the athletes compete without a crowd,” he said, although acknowledging that the absence of spectators would result in some economic fall-out.

“There is no...way that there would not be an economic fallout. It's already having economic fallout around the globe as sports is big business, and we are not just talking about track and field but basketball and football.”

ISSA president Keith Wellington had previously told the Jamaica Observer that the organization has started to discuss the situation and a meeting of a newly formed committee would be held to determine the way forward.