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## **Football and Summer**

### **The Issue: Tragedy strikes during high school practice.**

Tragedy struck Henderson County High School on Wednesday when a 16-year-old football player collapsed on the third day of practice and died a short time later.

It's a sad time for the family of Ryan M. Owens, his friends and community, and they have our sympathy.

At this writing, the cause of death had not been determined, so there was no way to know whether the oppressive heat of the past week had anything to do with Owens' death.

But even without a connection, we are drawn, again, to wonder why it is necessary to push the start of school and even earlier school-related activities back to nearly the middle of summer.

Once upon a time, schools almost everywhere in the United States started in September, either right before or right after Labor Day. And the school year ended in early June, sometime around Memorial Day.

One thing a September start did was reduce the possibilities that children would return to school in the distraction and discomfort caused by sweltering heat. It could happen in September, though not as frequently as in August.

But that all changed as more and more schools added air conditioning. The comfort it provided made inside learning possible in August, but did nothing to help students involved in outside activities, such as football practice.

Of course, an earlier start to school, now in mid-August, means that before-school activities, such as football practice, will begin even earlier. In Evansville right now, you can see football players out at some of the high schools' voluntary summer camps. What they are doing is getting ready for real practice, which begins July 31 in Indiana. In Henderson, Ky., practice had already begun.

We believe that the coaches and their staffs do all they can to protect the health of their players, allowing them breaks and water as often as necessary. Still, we seem to be tempting fate when we put high school athletes through their drills under the hot summer sun.

Around here, we love the start of football practice. It's one of the best times of the year, signaling the coming of autumn. But not before the calendar sets on July.

In Indiana, one argument for an early start to school could soon be eliminated.

Proponents of the early start argue that because of September standardized testing, such as ISTEP in Indiana, it's important to allow children and teachers several weeks of school in which to prepare.

But that argument could be eliminated if Gov. Mitch Daniels has his way and ISTEP testing is moved to the spring. Then proponents of the traditional school calendar could argue for a June end to school, to allow for more time to prepare for the test.

Call us old-fashioned, but we prefer that school and football season begin in September.