



AHSAA
ALABAMA HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

Best Practices

Return to Play for Spring Sports 2021

Approved January 20, 2021



AHSAA Best Practices

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AHSAA Best Practices

Return to Play for Winter Sports 2020-2021

Approved by the AHSAA Central Board of Control and Medical Advisory Committee.

This document is subject to change by approval of the Central Board as needed.

Best practices for championship play, and spring sports will be released as needed.

Purpose: To offer AHSAA member schools best practices in order to continue the 2020-21 school year athletic seasons as scheduled and have complete seasons through championship play; to educate our coaches and student-athletes how to safely live with the COVID-19 virus by following the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), and Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) guidelines while fostering an educational athletic environment; to develop our student-athletes as physically and safely as possible; to provide best practices for students, coaches, officials, and fans while participating and attending athletic events.

Local school administration should become familiar with the minimum requirements of the **Current State Health Order** (December 9, 2020) particularly paragraph 11. The document may be found at: <http://alabamapublichealth.gov/covid19/index.html>.

In addition, before beginning any athletic activities, the local school (system) should review the most recent guidelines provided by the CDC, ADPH, ALSDE, and local county/city health agencies and decide how best to implement those guidelines. The Alabama Department of Public Health's "Guidelines for Adult and Youth Athletic Activities" are available at <https://alabamapublichealth.gov/covid19/assets/cov-sah-athletic-facilities.pdf>.

We recommend that school affiliates, including but not limited to, administrators, coaches, players, officials, and spectators continue to follow the AHSAA "Best Practices Return to Play" document that was released on July 29th, 2020, and updated September 10, 2020, found at <https://www.ahsaa.com/>. In addition to the "Best Practices Return to Play", the following best practices are suggested for all AHSAA spring sports.

General Education:

- The state health order requires players, coaches, officials, and spectators to refrain from congregating within 6 feet of a person from another household except to the extent necessary for players, coaches, and officials to directly participate in the athletic activity. See paragraph 11.b(i) of the December 9, 2020 ADPH state health order.
 - **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings must be worn.** (See paragraphs 2 and 11.c of the December 9, 2020 state health order.)
- According to the state health order, "organizers of athletic activities shall take reasonable steps, where practicable, to regularly disinfect frequently used items and surfaces." (Based on paragraph 11.d of the December 9, 2020 Current Order of the State Health Officer). In addition, "players, coaches, and officials shall not share water coolers, drinking stations, water bottles, cups or other drinking devices" while participating in an athletic activity.

- **Additional Mitigation Strategies**

- Any student with a prior confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis should undergo an evaluation by his or her medical provider. Written medical clearance is recommended prior to participation. (*NFHS-AMSSM Guidance for Assessing Cardiac Issues in High Student-Athletes with COVID-19 Infection, July 9, 2020.*)
- Any student that was isolated due to a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis and/or had symptoms of COVID-19 must complete a minimum five-day acclimation period once released before returning to sport. A gradual return to activity is advised, and any athlete showing abnormal health issues should be evaluated and cleared by a physician prior to a return to sport activities.

Facilities:

- In accordance with the **Current State Health Order, paragraphs 11.b and 11.c**, spectators may attend athletic events, but attendance at events will be significantly reduced: **“Players, coaches, officials, and spectators shall not congregate within 6 feet of a person from another household except to the extent necessary- and only to the extent necessary- for players, coaches, and officials to directly participate in the athletic activity.”** Furthermore, **“...spectators shall wear a mask or other facial covering that covers his or her nostrils and mouth at all times while within six feet of a person from another household...”** (*Based on the December 9, 2020 Current Order of the State Health Officer*).
- Venues used to host athletic activities are not subject to a specific capacity limit, but capacity will necessarily be limited by the requirement to maintain proper distancing between spectators from different households.
- It is the recommendation of the AHSAA, **that all spectators be at minimum of 6 feet away from the playing area throughout the contest.** This will ensure the safety of the officials, as well as the players, during the contest. Failure to comply with the aforementioned mitigation recommendations, relative to crowd size, physical distancing and facial coverings, may result in immediate cancellation of a contest by the contest officials as well as, a school’s contract with an official’s association
- Member schools are expected to comply with CDC, ADPH and local health agencies related to best practices for facilities. **When physical distancing cannot be maintained in congested areas, such as entrances and exits, facial coverings are required as set out in paragraph 11.c of the December 9, 2020 state health order.**
- All decisions concerning spectators, student sections, seating, etc., are under the guidance of home or venue management and should be in accordance with the minimum requirements of the state health order (paragraph 11), including the order’s social distancing requirements, as well as CDC, ADPH, and local health guidelines.

Rules Modifications

- 2020-21 NFHS Sports and State Adopted Rules Modifications due to COVID-19 may be found on the AHSAA website or at NFHS.org.

Best Practices Regarding Contest Officials

- Host schools should communicate all local restrictions regarding COVID-19 prior to the event.
- Host schools should provide contest officials an area to enter and exit separate from fans when possible. Officials should be provided a dressing and meeting area that has been cleaned and disinfected prior to their arrival that provides for appropriate spacing between individuals.
- Dressing rooms should have hand sanitizer **if soap and water are not readily available.**
- Officials should self-screen every day for COVID-19 symptoms for themselves and family members.
- The score box/table should be limited to essential personnel which includes home team score board worker. **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are required as stated in paragraph 11.c of the state health order.**
- Officials in soccer may use an electronic whistle and wear cloth face coverings.
- Officials should have their own labeled, beverage container, and these should be brought onto the field for their use during time outs or breaks.
- During the pregame meeting remind coaches and participants that they should refrain from high fives, handshakes, and other physical contact except to the extent necessary—and only to the extent necessary—for participation in the activity. This is required by paragraph 11.b of the December 9, 2020 state health order.

Ticketing

- If attendance restrictions are in place, **equitable access for visiting fans must be provided.**
- The AHSAA does offer a CONTACTLESS, digital ticketing platform. Instructions may be found at the AHSAA website or at <https://gofan.co/app/school/AHSAA>
- GoFan offers a “CASHLESS” platform. *[Schools using the Cashless platform will be offered a restructured process fee.]*

Best Practices for Baseball:

- **Attendance**

- Attendance to events cannot exceed the current state health order. (See point #1 under General Education above).
- It is recommended that spectators be allowed to bring personal chairs and social distance from other spectators.
- All decisions concerning spectators, student sections, etc., are under the guidance of home management and should be in accordance with the minimum requirements of the state health order (paragraph 11), including the order's social distancing requirements, as well as CDC, ADPH, and local health guidelines.
- **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are required as stated in *paragraph 11.c* of the state health order.**

- **Contest Management**

- **Pregame Meetings**

- Umpires will meet with head coaches only. To ensure physical distance is maintained, coaches should stay outside the width of the batter's box at home plate, maintaining 6 feet of distance between each person.
- Coaches should wear facial coverings during pre-game meetings, when within coaching boxes, and during time-out conferences with players.
- All pregame handshakes between officials, coaches, and players should be avoided.
- Players shall not enter the field beyond dugout area to congratulate a runner that scores.
- Players and coaches should refrain from spitting sunflower seeds or gum in the dugout or on the field of play

- **Equipment**

- Plastic shields covering the entire face (**unless integrated into the face mask and attached to a helmet**) shall not be allowed during contests.
- Cloth facial coverings are recommended but not required. Facial coverings must be of one color, not distracting, and no designs. Pitchers cannot wear optic yellow cloth facial coverings.
- The game ball should be cleaned and placed at pitcher's mound prior to the start of the game and between innings.
- Teams may opt to furnish their own game balls to prevent crossover contact.
- Game balls should be cleaned and sanitized throughout the contest as recommended by the ball manufacturer. Suggested ball cleaning methods may be found at the following link: <https://bit.ly/3g531et>.
- It is recommended that players do not share helmets, bats, drying towels, or catcher's equipment if possible.

- **Postgame Meetings**

- Postgame sportsmanship meetings should take place without handshakes.

- Examples include, but are not limited to, players line up on baseline and tip hat to opponent; players crossover from 1st to 3rd remaining 6 ft apart without handshakes, etc.
 - **Regular Season Contests**
 - Due to ADPH and CDC sanitization guidelines and limited officials available, the maximum number of games played on the same date and in the same gymnasium should be limited.
 - **Area Contests**
 - Regular season area contests should be played as early as possible. but no later than April 17 for 1A-6A and April 24 for 7A.
 - If a scheduled area game is cancelled, the original contest is entered in DragonFly as a forfeit. When and if the game is rescheduled and played, the score is entered for that contest, and the original forfeited game is removed from the schedule. Area contests should be played if at all possible and take precedent over non-area contests.
 - Forfeitures will be calculated for final area standings.
- **Tournaments**
 - Number of teams should be limited unless multiple facilities are used.
 - Entrances and exits should be different for spectators and participants.
 - Round-robin format is encouraged to avoid crossover of fields and to keep teams from waiting around to play.
 - Large gatherings under tents (Also known as tent cities or communities) should be discouraged.
 - **Team Dugouts:**
 - Team dugouts/benches will need to be extended or modified to accommodate social distancing.
 - Team benches should be cleaned and sanitized between games.
 - Create space between the dugout and spectator seating. No spectators should be seated or standing within 6 feet of dugout.
 - Players, coaches, managers, etc. on team bench should wear facial coverings when not actively participating in the contest.
 - Dugouts should be limited to individuals essential to playing the contest.
 - Assistant coaches, bookkeeper, statistician, trainer, photographers, etc. should be outside the dugout if social distancing cannot be maintained.
 - Team rosters may need to be reduced to maintain social distancing in the dugout.
 - **Scorer's Table**
 - The scorer's table/box should be limited to essential personnel with a recommended distance of six feet between individuals. The number allowed is determined by the space available in the box. **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are required as stated in paragraph 11.c of the state health order.**

Best Practices for Softball:

- **Attendance**

- Attendance to events cannot exceed the current state health order. (See point #1 under General Education above).
- It is recommended that spectators be allowed to bring personal chairs and social distance from other spectators.
- All decisions concerning spectators, student sections, etc., are under the guidance of home management and should be in accordance with the minimum requirements of the state health order (paragraph 11), including the order's social distancing requirements, as well as CDC, ADPH, and local health guidelines.
- When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are required as stated in paragraph 11.c of the state health order.

- **Contest Management**

- Any time multiple contests are played on the same day, dugouts and benches should be cleaned and disinfected between games. This may require more time between games.
 - Pregame Meetings
- Umpires will meet with head coaches only. To ensure physical distance is maintained, coaches should stay outside the width of the batter's box at home plate, maintaining 6 feet of distance between each person.
- Coaches should wear facial coverings during pre-game meetings, when within coaching boxes, and during time-out conferences with players.
- All pregame handshakes between officials, coaches, and players should be avoided.
 - Players shall not enter the field beyond dugout area to congratulate a runner that scores.
 - Players and coaches should refrain from spitting sunflower seeds or gum in the dugout or on the field of play.
 - Players shall provide personal water containers.

- **Equipment**

- Plastic shields covering the entire face (**unless integrated into the face mask and attached to a helmet**) shall not be allowed during contests.
- Cloth facial coverings are recommended but not required. Facial coverings must be of one color, not distracting, and no designs. Pitchers cannot wear optic yellow cloth facial coverings.
- The game ball should be cleaned and placed at pitcher's mound prior to the start of the game and between innings.
- Teams may opt to furnish their own game balls to prevent crossover contact.
- Game balls should be cleaned and sanitized throughout the contest as recommended by the ball manufacturer. Suggested ball cleaning methods may be found at the following link: <https://bit.ly/3g531et>.
- It is recommended that players do not share helmets, bats, drying towels, or catcher's equipment if possible.
- **Postgame Meetings**

- Postgame sportsmanship meetings should take place without handshakes.
- Teams shall not gather at the pitcher's circle for postgame celebrations.
- **Regular Season Contests**
 - Due to ADPH and CDC sanitization guidelines and limited officials available, the maximum number of games played on the same date should be limited.
- **Area Contests**
 - Regular season area contests should be played as early as possible and no later than April 24, 2021.
 - If a scheduled area game is cancelled, the original contest is entered in DragonFly as a forfeit. When and if the game is rescheduled and played, the score is entered for that contest, and the original forfeited game is removed from the schedule. Area contests should be played if at all possible and take precedent over non-area contests.
 - Forfeitures will be calculated for final area standings.
- **Tournaments**
 - Number of teams should be limited unless multiple facilities are used.
 - A round-robin format is encouraged to eliminate teams from having to remain throughout the day/night to play.
 - Tournament contests should be played in sessions to clear venues between sessions to maintain social distancing.
 - Entrances and exits should be different for spectators and participants.
 - Large gatherings under tents (also known as tent cities or communities) should be discouraged.
- **Team Dugouts**
 - Team dugouts/benches will need to be extended or modified to accommodate social distancing.
 - Dugouts should be limited to individuals essential to playing the contest.
 - Assistant coaches, bookkeeper, statistician, trainer, photographers, etc. should be outside the dugout if social distancing cannot be maintained.
 - Team rosters may need to be reduced to maintain social distancing in the dugout.
 - Players and coaches not actively participating in the contest should wear facial coverings inside the dugout at all times.
 - Batter on deck should retrieve previous batter's bat to eliminate other players from entering the playing field.
 - Team dugouts and benches should be cleaned and sanitized between games.
 - Create space between the team dugouts and spectator seating. No spectators should be seated or standing within 6 feet of dugout.
- **Scorer's Table**
 - The scorer's table/box should be limited to essential personnel with a recommended distance of six feet between individuals. The number allowed is determined by the space available in the box. **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are required as stated in paragraph 11.c of the state health order.**

Best Practices for Golf:

▪ **Attendance**

- Attendance cannot exceed the current state health order. (See point #1 under General Education above). *Please note, if players waiting to participate or players after participating are seated in the stands, they will count toward the allowed attendance capacity.*
- The number of participants and spectators will be determined by the local courses and should be in accordance with the minimum requirements of the state health order (paragraph 11), including the order's social distancing requirements, as well as CDC, ADPH, and local health guidelines.
- **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are required as stated in paragraph 11.c of the state health order.**

▪ **Event Management**

- Schools should become knowledgeable of individual course guidelines, restrictions, and requirements BEFORE playing a course.
- All players will wear masks or gaiters before practice/matches while putting, chipping, or moving about the practice area, etc.
- As normal golf etiquette and play-no sharing of any equipment will be allowed. Each player should carry hand sanitizer in their bags.
- All players will wear mask or gaiter while playing the round but can remove facial covering while playing their shot or walking on course when they are 6ft or more from other players in their group. This should be through the green on each hole.
 1. It is the coaches' responsibility to have their players educated on the process of social distancing in golf. This process should be used during practice as well.
- While teeing off, players need to stay distanced. This should be the same practice on each green.
- All groups will be threesomes.
- Scorecards – Options to keep the score card process safer.
 1. Score cards will be issued to each player and each player will keep the whole group's score on each hole. Cards can be compared at scorer's table.
 2. Each player has their own card with name, school name, etc. and the starter hands out the scorecards, giving the players an opponent's card to keep score (This option keeps players from handling two different cards) then when round is complete, the scorer handles the cards without players touching. Handing cards to players for checking hole by hole score.
 3. Use score cards as we always have, but players must handle with gloves while switching with opponents and handling in scoring tent. Most players wear a glove during play, if not they can use while switching.
- The process of final scoring must be used in a way that social distancing is kept. Recommendations include, but are not limited to, scoring table is larger than usual with 3 chairs and scorer 6ft away from each other; each player will have to examine each scoring card; masks must be worn during scoring; coaches should have their team not standing together around other teams while waiting for completion of scoring.

- Tournament play- social distancing protocol should be established by each tournament director/coordinator and sent to team participants one week before said tournament. Teams will be led by their coaches to make sure all protocols are followed.
- **Postgame Meetings**
 - Postgame sportsmanship meetings should take place without handshakes.

Best Practices for Soccer:

- **Attendance**

- Attendance to events cannot exceed the current state health order. (See point #1 under General Education above). Please note, if players waiting to participate or players after participating are seated in the stands, they will count toward the allowed attendance capacity.
- It is recommended that spectators be allowed to bring personal chairs and social distance from other spectators.
- All decisions concerning spectators, student sections, etc., are under the guidance of home management and should be in accordance with the minimum requirements of the state health order (paragraph 11), including the order's social distancing requirements, as well as CDC, ADPH, and local health guidelines.
- When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are required as stated in paragraph 11.c of the state health order.

- **Contest Management**

- Any time multiple contests are played on the same day, team benches should be cleaned and disinfected between games. This may require more time between games.
- Pregame Meetings
 - Separate meetings should be held for coaches and team captains. Officials will meet with head coaches first, then meet with team captains. Each school is allowed one coach and one captain in pregame meetings.
 - To ensure physical distance is maintained, the pregame meetings with officials will take place around midfield.
 - All pregame handshakes between officials and players should be avoided.

- **Equipment**

- The game ball should be cleaned and placed at midfield prior to the start of the game.
- Game balls should be cleaned and sanitized throughout the contest as recommended by the ball manufacturer. Suggested ball cleaning methods may be found at the following link:
<https://bit.ly/3g531et>.

- **Postgame Meetings**

- Postgame sportsmanship meetings should take place without handshakes.

- **Regular Season Contests**

- Due to ADPH and CDC sanitization guidelines and limited officials available, the maximum number of games played on the same date should be limited.

- **Area Contests**

- Regular season area contests should be played as early as possible but no later than April 19, 2021.
- If a scheduled area game is cancelled because a team cannot play on that date, the original contest is entered in DragonFly as a forfeit. When and if the game is rescheduled and played, the score is entered for that contest, and the original forfeited game is removed from the

schedule. Area contests should be played if at all possible and take precedent over non-area contests.

- Forfeitures will be calculated for final area standings.

- **Tournaments**

- Number of teams should be limited unless multiple facilities are used.
- Entrances and exits should be different for spectators and participants.

- **Team Benches**

- Team benches will need to be extended or modified to accommodate social distancing. Benches may be extended to the edge of the penalty box in order to maintain physical distance between players.
- Team benches should be cleaned and sanitized between games.
- Create space between the team benches and spectator seating or place team benches opposite spectator seating.
- Players, coaches, managers, etc. on team bench should wear facial coverings when not actively participating in the contest.
- Substitutions should be made closer to center line except for injuries or cautions (when they can sub from the bench). In order to maintain social distance, fields should have a designated area for each team's subs to stand near midfield, but 6 feet from the other designated area so as to not intermingle the teams.

Best Practices for Tennis:

- **Attendance**

- Attendance to events cannot exceed the current state health order. (See point #1 under General Education above). Please note, if players waiting to participate or players after participating are seated in the stands, they will count toward the allowed attendance capacity.
- It is recommended that spectators be allowed to bring personal chairs and social distance from other spectators.
- All decisions concerning spectators, student sections, etc., are under the guidance of home management and should be in accordance with the minimum requirements of the state health order (paragraph 11), including the order's social distancing requirements, as well as CDC, ADPH, and local health guidelines.
- When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are required as stated in paragraph 11.c of the state health order.

- **Contest Management**

- **Pre-match Meetings**

The host coach will have a welcome meeting with each team being on the court on their established home and visitor side of the net (appropriately social distanced). During this meeting, the following topics should be covered in addition to usual information that is shared at this meeting.

- Home and Visitor benches will remain constant throughout all matches. Only home players will sit on or touch the bench on the home side and visiting players will sit on or touch the bench on the visitor side.
 - Social distancing should be maintained, and masks worn during pre-match meetings.
 - All pregame handshakes between officials and players should be avoided.
 - Players may offer an acknowledgment such as a nod, a thumbs up or a "good match" or a racquet tap instead of shaking hands.
 - Benches should be at least 6 ft apart
 - Any time multiple matches are played on the same day, player benches should be cleaned and disinfected between matches. This may require more time between matches.
 - The visiting team could always get the choice of serve or side, so there is no need for a racket spin or if coaches choose to use the spin social distancing must be maintained.
 - Establish a home and visitor side of the net to remain constant throughout the entire match. Only home players would sit on or touch the bench on the home side and the same for the visitor side. Benches should be at least 6ft apart.
 - Players shall stay on their side of the court and at least 3 feet from the net when introducing themselves, for the racket spin (if used) and for discussion between players during the match.
 - Players will change only his/her score and will not touch the opponent's score.
 - Players should not hand balls to each other.
 - When changing sides/crossovers, players will change sides of the net at opposite ends.
 - Hand sanitizer should be available for players to use at the cross overs.

- Players should bring their own personal water containers, towels, and any other personal items they may need and store those items in their tennis bag when not in use.
- Coaches shall wear facial covering that covers both nose and mouth when coaching players at the fence.
- At the conclusion of the match, players may meet at the net 6 ft apart and extend rackets over the net and tap them.
- **Tournaments**
 - All communication should be done digitally (text or email) or with a public address system. Players should not gather in groups waiting to be called to a court or to turn in their score. Text/email the coach and the player to call them to the court. Scores could also be reported in the same manner.
 - Limit the number of teams or make sure venues provide enough space to allow social distancing for the number of teams in the tournament.
 - Team tents that allow multiple individuals different households to gather should be discouraged.

Outdoor Track Considerations:

- **Attendance**

- Attendance at all events, cannot exceed the current state health order. (See point #1 under General Education above). *Please note, if players waiting to participate or players after participating are seated in the stands, they will count toward the allowed attendance capacity.*
- All decisions concerning spectators, student sections, etc., are under the guidance of home management and should be in accordance with the minimum requirements of the state health order (paragraph 11), including the order's social distancing requirements, as well as CDC, ADPH, and local health guidelines.
- **When physical distancing cannot be maintained, facial coverings are required as stated in paragraph 11.c of the state health order.**

- **Event Management**

- Utilize NFHS considerations to best handle the meets you are hosting according to the size/capacity of stadium/complex.
- Schools should make a judgement call on the number of schools and athletes that participate in the Meet. Not all venues are the same; some have very limited space, while others may be able to accommodate a much larger group.
- Host schools can mark off sections in the bleachers or fields to keep schools/teams away from one another.
- Teams hosting events can have athletes from the same school throw or jump in a row to eliminate cross contamination with other athletes. Once all athletes from that school are finished with their events, they will leave the facility.
- Create spacing in the clerk area at check-in to maintain social distancing.
- Space heats out around the track to maintain social distancing.
- Limit number of teams and/or number of entrants to keep the flow of the meet from bogging down.
- Athletes and coaches not actively participating in an event should be separated from the spectators.
- Athletes not actively participating in an event should wear facial coverings.
- Field access should be limited to essential personnel only. This would include "active" participants, officials and meet personnel.
- Coaching boxes should be limited to one coach per school per box.
- When possible, athletes should warm-up outside the field.
- Athletes should wear a facial covering until they have moved into their lane for the competition or it is their turn for a field event. Immediately upon completion of their race or event, the facial covering should be placed back on the athlete.
- When possible, once an athlete has finished his or her events for the day, he or she should exit the facility for the day.
- All athletes and coaches should have their own labeled beverage container as there should be no shared water coolers or containers.

- Hand sanitizer should be available throughout the facility and used by all athletes before and after touching the starting blocks.

General Considerations:

(SP-shot put; DT-Discuss Throw; JT- Javelin Throw; LJ- Long Jump; TJ- Triple Jump; HJ- High Jump; PV- Pole Vault; RL-Relays)

- SP, DT, JT should enforce social distancing for all athletes and officials.
 - To limit contact: athletes can provide their own implements (that pass inspection) and retrieve their own implements after all throws.
 - If athletes cannot provide their own implements, then it is recommended that implements be sanitized between each use.
- LJ, TJ should enforce social distancing for all athletes and officials.
- HJ, PV should enforce social distancing for all athletes and officials.
 - To lower the risk of these events meets can cover pits by a tarp that is removed and disinfected after each athlete (therefore multiple tarps needed to keep event moving).
 - To limit contact: athletes should not share vaulting poles or poles should be sanitized after each use.
- Sprint, Hurdle, relay events run entirely in lanes, may use every other lane to assist with distancing.
 - Blocks should be disinfected after each heat / race.
 - Recommend not using baskets at start line for apparel.
- RL events. Batons should not be shared between teams and should be cleaned after each race.