

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Since high school practices started last week, there had been just seven girls committed to play on the high school softball team this fall.

Due to those low numbers, administrators met with Head Coach Denise Smith last Wednesday, and determined after the meeting, that softball won't be played this year at Chase County Schools.

The Longhorn team's first game was to be held today (Thursday) at Southern Valley.

Chase County Schools' Activities Director Mark Bottom said there had been a "solid seven" girls at softball practices since Aug. 17.

Since the NSAA requires nine players to start a game, it wasn't enough to field a team.

AD Bottom said Tuesday he has contacted all of the schools on the Longhorn softball schedule, and is trying to "accommodate those schools as much as possible."

All the schools the Longhorns were to have played this fall have been sent the CCS softball schedule, in hopes they might be able to fill in the now-open dates when they were to play CCS.

One did get worked out for this weekend, and the games will be played in Imperial, Bottom said. Scottsbluff and Southern Valley will play two games at Schroeder Park. Chase County had Scottsbluff on its schedule for this Saturday.

Getting the maximum number of games in during the short, softball season is important to schools, Bottom said, because games played are a factor in figuring the statewide point standings.

CCS will have to pay some money to the officials who were contracted to umpire Longhorn games here, Bottom said.

As far as a 2010 team, Bottom said he will have to know by early in March if there are enough players. A decision on a 2010 team will then be made, and if enough commit, scheduling for the fall will start.

Bottom said he will take a poll of the eighth grade class early next year to see how many plan to play softball, then meet with the high school players.

"We'll make a decision using that information," he said.

Supt. Matt Fisher said he is hopeful there will be a team in 2010, and indicated there may be several in the eighth grade class interested.

Coach Smith said at a softball interest meeting for incoming eighth grades held in May, 12 girls from that class attended.

Supt. Fisher was at last week's decision meeting, along with Grade 7-12 Principal Mike Sorensen and AD Bottom.

Smith said, despite no official team this year, she and assistant coach Jason Speck are practicing twice weekly through the softball season with those girls who had gone out this year.

"We want to maintain their skills, and the administration is behind this, too," she said.

She and Speck are being paid their coaches' salaries on a pro-rated basis for the time they spent at practice before the meeting last week, and for those practices in the coming weeks.

Last season, Chase County fielded a softball team of 12 girls, but due to injuries, was down to nine at districts.

Efforts were made to co-op with Wauneta-Palisade or Perkins County Schools for softball, but

neither school was interested, Supt. Fisher said.