

Ruling may impact future prep coverage

Written by Mark Dukes

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As it has for years, coverage of high school sports is evolving.

Newspapers, radio and television have provided the bulk of information on games for some time, but now websites – such as Metro Sports Report – and other online options have become available.

Where it goes is anyone's guess. But it could be that a three-judge panel in Chicago will have a lot to say about the way high school sports are brought to you.

The 7th Circuit Court of Appeals will issue a ruling in the coming months on a case that began in 2008 between the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association and a newspaper. The WIAA sued the Appleton Post-Crescent after the paper streamed live coverage of high school football playoff games.

A U.S. District judge ruled in favor of the WIAA last year, claiming its exclusive deal with a production company did not violate the Constitutional rights of newspapers and other media. The Chicago judges heard the case in January.

For a couple years now, the Iowa High School Sports Network has charged radio stations that wish to do live coverage of state tournaments. Fees are \$150 for football starting with the semifinals, \$150 per game in basketball and baseball, \$100 per game in softball and \$125 for all sessions of wrestling. Television stations are allowed to run highlights but no live coverage.

However, there are no provisions for newspaper and website coverage. Essentially, a credentialed newspaper or website could stream live play-by-play if it wishes. It could use Facebook to give nearly instantaneous updates, an option some reporters utilize now.

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The IHSSN has been operated with cooperation from the Iowa High School Athletic Association and Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union since 2006. The network says its live game transmissions of state tournaments are protected by various communications and copyright acts.

Perhaps, but that doesn't make complete sense. Sectional, district, sub-state and regional competition are conducted by the IHSA and IGHSU, although the network does not televise those games. Radio stations can broadcast those pre-state tournament games at no charge.

Locally, KCRG 9.2 began live coverage of regular season basketball games in the Metro area. That's OK with the IHSSN since those are regular season games. Mediacom has done televised Metro football games but only on a delayed basis.

I suspect in the coming years coverage of high school sports will continue to evolve. Although I have not pressed MSR President Jim Ecker about his plans for the website, I can assure you coverage here will become as complete and as aggressive as possible.

In the federal case with Wisconsin prep sports coverage, the crux of the matter is rights. The WIAA contends it has exclusive rights to its championships, and media outlets not affiliated or aligned with it cannot provide live coverage, streaming or otherwise.

In Iowa and with the IHSSN, it is also about the rights of the boys' and girls' state associations. But what about media rights? Should broadcasters and writers and web reporters have to pay their way? Should organizations be allowed to provide streaming video of state events?

Evolution of the internet probably will have something to say about things in the future. As will a group of judges in Chicago. Be assured, state high school associations and media everywhere are watching.