



This week, representatives of the Iowa High School Athletic Association will be in Eastern Iowa to talk with administrators from the Mississippi Valley Conference schools about the possibility of district football coming to Class 4A schools starting next school year. The non-4A schools have been playing district football for the last two decades, for the most part with great success. The question is, why should the big schools enter into this plan as well?

District football was much needed by the smaller four classes when it was adopted back in 1992. The football playoff system for those schools in conference play was not a good one. Smaller schools that played larger schools were given more playoff points than schools that actually won games against teams of equal or smaller size. On several occasions you had a school with an undefeated or one-loss record being left out of the playoffs for a school that had two or more losses, but played against bigger schools.

It was not fair, so something had to be done and conferences were disbanded in football in favor of districts. All games within the district count towards the playoffs, those against teams outside the district do not.

But this is not a problem in Class 4A on the eastern side of the state. The 10-team Mississippi Athletic Conference plays a round-robin schedule. Teams in the 14-team Mississippi Valley Conference play nine games (six within their division and three crossover) and all count in the league standings. Yes, some schools' crossover games are much harder than others, so I concede that is the one fly in the ointment for equality.

The movement for district play started with the Class 4A schools in Central and Western Iowa. Missouri River Conference teams (Council Bluffs and Sioux City schools) have had to play teams from the Central Iowa Metro League and some Class 3A teams (Heelan, Harlan, Lewis Central, etc.) for years to fill out their schedules. Those games against non-4A teams come with a point penalty. Class 4A teams playing 3A squads lose five points off the top. They lose 10 against 2A clubs and 15 against 1A outfits.

If district football started, those games would not count. Also, schools from Sioux City could

To district, or not to district ...

Written by Scott Unash

Tuesday, 13 September 2011 20:02 - Last Updated Wednesday, 14 September 2011 17:55

perhaps play non-district games against South Dakota teams once again and cut down on travel without having those games count against them for making the playoffs. The CIML would be able to play games among their 18 conference schools and they wouldn't have to take long road trips either (unless Mason City and Ottumwa are playing each other).

Also, do you keep the Class at 48 schools or have the cutoff be schools with 700 or more students in grades 9-11? The latter would give 4A an uneven number and would affect the number of teams in each district.

There are two main reasons I see against district football in 4A. Schedules would not be equitable and, depending upon the number of teams in each district, it could mean that half of a school's schedule would be made up of non-district games that would not count toward the district standings.

Other questions to consider are how districts would be drawn up in the new 4A. While conferences would stay the same, for the most part, in Western and Central Iowa, would you mix up the MVC and MAC teams on the Eastern side?

District football was a great idea for the smaller schools in the state. It made the path to the playoffs more equitable. But, I really don't see any advantage to trying this in Class 4A where the current playoff plan has worked for many years.

However, as with most surveys that are sent out to schools and ideas from the IHSAA and the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union that are going to be discussed, the verdict more than likely already has been made.

My bet is that we will have 4A district football next fall.

(Scott Unash is the sports and program director at KGYM-AM 1600. He is a six-time winner of the Iowa Broadcast News Association play-by-play Announcer of the Year Award. Scott and Mark Dukes co-host the Gym Class weekdays from 3-4 p.m. on KGYM)