

Piecing together the tourneys

Written by Scott Unash

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The next two weeks begin a huge time for prep boys and girls basketball teams in the Metro area and across Iowa.

Not only are teams trying to fit all their “pieces” together to come up with the best possible combination to win games, but also the pairings for the various substate and regional tournaments will be determined.

The Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union for many years has done a splendid job in getting the best teams to Des Moines for the state tournament. They have patented the process.

In some cases the Rand McNally atlas has taken a slight beating, but they will make exceptions and ignore geography to avoid having two quality teams meet before the state tournament if they are in close proximity.

That hasn't been the case on the boys side, until this year.

The Iowa High School Athletic Association had determined substate tournaments in the summer and fall for the next basketball season, long before knowing which teams would be the best in each class. This was based mainly on geography and more often than not resulted in rated teams that were both state-tournament worthy meeting in the substates because they were geographically close together.

The IHSAA has changed that process this year and is waiting until the month of February to put the brackets together in an attempt to get the best teams to the Wells Fargo Arena for the state tournament. Geography still will play a role, so don't expect the “region jumping” that you see on the girls side of things.

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This week we will concentrate on the girls road to Des Moines and look into the crystal ball and see who may be going in which direction on the road to State. Keep in mind, no matter the rankings, one conference is not going to dominate the field of eight in Des Moines come March. So, despite the latest rankings I don't see the Girls Union bringing in six teams from the MVC.

That's what makes this week so very big with head-to-head matchups between Metro heavyweights. It actually started last Friday night with the Linn-Mar win over Xavier. That win should help give the Lions a little easier road to the state tournament. It continued Monday night when Washington outlasted Xavier, 47-37. The consensus among people in the know was that the winner of that matchup would be rewarded with an easier regional placement.

That sets up the showdown Thursday, perhaps the regular season girls Metro Game of the Year -- Linn-Mar at Washington. All these games will help determine which direction teams will be assigned for the road to the state tournament.

With all this in mind, here is what I think will happen in Class 4A. I do not see five teams from the Cedar Rapids-Iowa City area getting to Des Moines, so you will see a couple of teams have to battle head-to-head in a regional final. I think this may be some combination of Xavier and Iowa City High, along with a Waterloo West.

I see a little easier road for defending state champion Linn-Mar, which I believe will not have a big challenge in making its way back to Des Moines. Washington could be a team that will have to defeat an array of city schools, such as Kennedy, Jefferson, or Prairie. It is all speculation, but I do see one region that could contain several Metro teams together. We will all find out soon, so let the guessing begin.

Next week, we tackle the boys projections.

(Scott Unash is sports director at 1600-KGYM. He and Mark Dukes host the Gym Class weekdays from 2-3 p.m.)