

No guarantees for Metro boys teams

Written by Jim Ecker

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Todd Tharp is the answer to your question.

He's the official at the Iowa High School Athletic Association who's in charge of making the Class 4A substate assignments for boys basketball this season.

It's not an easy job. He's got to study the teams and geography, then find an equitable solution that makes it possible for the best eight clubs to reach the state tournament.

There are 48 teams in Class 4A. The IHSAA will announce the eight substate assignments on Monday, but will wait until Feb. 7 or Feb. 8 to announce the pairings. It's a two-step process.

Six teams will be assigned to each substate on Monday, but they won't know who they'll play until two weeks after that. That gives Tharp more time to analyze results, seed teams and set the games.

This Monday is a crucial date for the four Metro teams that are ranked in to the Top 10, because they'd like to be assigned to four different substates. That way, all of them could make the state tournament without facing each other in a substate.

If two of them are assigned to the same substate, one of them would be eliminated before the eight-team field is set for the state tournament in Des Moines March 9-12.

Tharp has been studying the teams since September, compiling information on returning starters, last year's results and the apparent overall strength of each club. He's prepared a preliminary map of substate assignments, but is still working on it.

"I'll come in this Saturday and Sunday and make the final tweaks," said Tharp, who is an assistant executive director at the IHSAA.

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It would be great for Metro basketball if Linn-Mar, Jefferson, Kennedy and Washington all make the state tournament, but that can only happen if they're assigned to four different substates.

Linn-Mar and Jefferson, ranked 1-2 in the state, probably will be sent to different substates, but what about No.6 Kennedy and co-No.10 Washington? That's where it gets dicey.

Washington hosts Linn-Mar Friday night and Kennedy hosts Jefferson, so the Warriors and Cougars can help themselves with victories. Conversely, they hurt the Lions and J-Hawks.

Tharp will be watching.

"Do I need to put Linn-Mar and Kennedy different ways, or Linn-Mar and Jefferson?" he wondered.

Tharp is limited by geography. One of the substates will be along the Missouri River, where Sioux City East is the likely top seed. Three of the substates will be in central Iowa, where Ankeny, Hoover, Waukee and Urbandale are battling. Tharp is not inclined to send a Metro team to central Iowa.

That leaves four substates for eastern Iowa, which means Linn-Mar, Jefferson, Kennedy and Washington could be assigned to each of them. One of the substates will be along the Mississippi River, which is not out of reach for a Metro team. There could be substates in Cedar Rapids, Waterloo/Cedar Falls, Dubuque, Iowa City or Davenport, and the Metro teams could be assigned to any of them.

Remember, the sites will not be announced Monday. Just the groupings.

Tharp will continue to study the teams through the first weekend in February. Then he'll seed

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the teams 1 through 6 for each substate, based on point totals, and make the pairings. The No.1 and No.2 seeds will get first-round byes.

The point totals are based on results from Games 5 through 15 for each team, and we're in the middle of that time slot for everyone. There are still key games to be played.

Tharp knows about the quality of basketball in the Metro area and wants to be as fair as possible, but there are no guarantees Linn-Mar, Jefferson, Kennedy and Washington will be sent to separate substates.

"No," he said good-naturedly, "I wouldn't go quite that far."