

Boys substates: A promise somewhat delivered

Written by Scott Unash

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Myself, like most coaches, players and fans of high school boys basketball, were delighted by the announcement last fall by the Iowa High School Athletic Association that they would wait to assign the substate groupings until the season was in progress.

This had been a long-time goal of the Iowa Basketball Coaches Association. The IBCA wanted to eliminate early tournament "marquee matchups" and to get the best teams to Des Moines and the state tournament.

While I was happy with this announcement, I also was leery. I heard from several reliable sources that "geography" still would be a big factor in determining the substate groups. At that moment, I knew there would be trouble.

The groups have been released -- 4A and 3A this week -- and the other two classes last week.

So, how did the IHSAA do?

In my opinion they got one class right, a passing grade in a second, and whiffed on the other two.

First the good news.

It probably is not an accident that Class 4A has the best distribution. I think the IHSAA did a great job with this class, although with 48 teams it probably was the easiest to figure out. Also, because the coaches from this particular class have been by far the most vocal in having the substate process amended, they were more than likely going to get what they wanted.

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Metro fans can't grumble. Yes, we would like to be selfish and get all four of the teams that have been rated so far this season into the state tournament. But, that is just not practical and possible. The Mississippi Athletic Conference has good teams this year and they should get a shot at getting one to state.

Looking back, we were probably right in determining that the Kennedy-Jefferson game last Friday night had a big bearing on the substate placing. With the win Kennedy may have received a slightly easier overall path, even though they will more than likely have to face Washington for a third time.

Now we come to the other classes.

I give the IHSAA a passing grade in 1A because the class is very balanced this year and I think that each substate group was represented by a small number of good teams. It was fairly easy to put that one together.

The big mysteries involve 2A and, especially, 3A.

From what I understood, we were going to avoid early round matchups between top teams. However, in Class 2A you have a substate grouping featuring four teams that have been rated throughout the year in West Branch, North Cedar, Mid-Prairie and Iowa City Regina. The same is true in Class 3A with Solon, Davenport Assumption and Dubuque Wahlert all grouped together.

Meanwhile the substate just to the north has our Metro 3A representative Marion, along with seven other area teams, but NONE of them are rated. At least two of those teams should have been sent in other directions if the IHSAA was sticking to the original philosophy of trying to get the best teams to the state tournament. It seems to me that "geography" played a big role in this decision and that this sort of substate placing is not much different from back in the days of releasing the substate pairings before the State Baseball Tournament had taken place.

I still can't grasp the concept of having to sort all other sports "geographically," when in the first

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round of the football playoffs some teams had to travel three plus hours on a school night.

Something just doesn't wash with these two philosophies.