

Sweeping grid playoff proposals tabled

Written by Bill Seals
Thursday, 12 December 2013 16:46 -

BOONE - Perhaps the biggest news out of Thursday morning's Iowa High School Athletic Association board meeting was that its members decided not to vote on a restructuring of the state football playoff system, instead opting to table the discussion until next month.

The IHSAA Football Playoff Committee met Wednesday, Dec. 5, and voted to put four measures in front of the board for vote, one of which dealt with overhauling the state playoff system. However, given that members had little time to evaluate the measures, the board will instead take action in January.

According to the minutes from last week's meeting released to Metro Sports Report, the proposal would use week nine as the first round of playoffs for teams placing first through fourth in their district and the 4A qualifiers. For first round games in 8-player through Class 3A, district champions would play a fourth-place district team, and a district runner-up would play the third-place team. District champions would not play each other until the quarterfinal round.

Additionally, it would discontinue sister districts for regular season and postseason for classes 8-player through 3A, and a 125-mile travel limitation would be instituted for first round games. The IHSAA would no longer pre-set brackets for the playoffs and pairings would be determined after each round.

Postseason games in the first three rounds would be played on Friday nights, as opposed to the traditional Friday/Wednesday/Monday arrangement, with no change regarding host assignments. No neutral sites will be used during those first three rounds.

Non-playoff qualifiers would use the ninth week as their final regular season game with those finishing fifth, sixth and seventh in districts being paired by the IHSAA with other teams placing in similar order.

"(The committee) is taking into consideration safety factors with the turnaround time of our games, from an educational standpoint of playing on a Wednesday and Monday night, and also the travel distance on school nights," said IHSAA executive director Rick Wulkow.

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“The important factors here are loss of school time, with student-athletes being out of the classroom for extreme travel. We’re trying to get our arms around that better than we had this year when we had 25 games that teams traveled over 125 miles. That’s probably 2 ½ hours of travel or more, with travel back after the games.”

In non-playoff news, a fourth recommendation put in front of the board dealt with the forfeiture policy. The committee would like to see it revised to add some discretion to schools hit by extraordinary circumstances.

“Currently, once a team starts a season, if they have a forfeiture their season is over,” Wulkow said. “There are times that I don’t think that’s a good policy. If you have a flu epidemic, 20 kids are out for football, eight of them are sick and two of them are injured... then you have 10 able bodies. That’s a reason for forfeiture, but it shouldn’t take them out of the rest of the season because those kids can recover.”

If approved, the IHSAA would evaluate all forfeitures on an individual basis and rule if those teams can continue play.

“The school’s administration would present their issue. If it’s ‘we don’t want to play Xavier and Kennedy because they’re going to beat the crap out of us,’ then I’m sorry. You either play them or your season is over.”

Albeit briefly, the IHSAA board discussed one of the hot topics in the eastern portion of the state – scheduling for the Mississippi Valley and Mississippi Athletic conferences. With some oversight from members of the IHSAA board, both leagues met last Thursday at the Hotel at Kirkwood to discuss scheduling options for the 2014 season.

However, since the conferences could not come to a consensus prior to Thursday’s IHSAA board meeting, Wulkow and administrators didn’t have much to share.

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"We had a lot of great discussion and went over what the options of scheduling are, before going into small groups," he said. "Everybody had a voice. They broke into conference sessions and talked about what their scheduling needs are. It was a very productive meeting, but no decisions were made.

"When I left the meeting, I did inform everybody we needed to know going into the break, because when we come back we're going to start our process. If there is no change, we will schedule as we have previously and (Class) 4A East would be responsible for their own schedule."

The IHSA-imposed deadline is Dec. 20, and the conferences are evaluating a number of different options.

"I know they're committed to having a decision made by that deadline, regarding whether they're going to stay as conferences," Wulkow said. "Maybe they try a hybrid schedule where a couple of MAC schools play a couple of MVC schools, or make their own conference work with the numbers they have, or decide to go to district football."

The MVC has agreed to let Dubuque Wahlert remain a member of the conference but pursue other opportunities in football. Wulkow said Cedar Rapids Xavier and Davenport Assumption also are entertaining other alternatives.

Xavier athletic director Mike Winker told the Metro Sports Report on Thursday that the Saints will drop to Class 3A "if the MVC does not exist in its current format for football." If Dubuque Wahlert drops to Class 3A or a hybrid schedule is approved, Winker said the Saints will drop to 3A. Sources told the MSR that Wahlert will drop to 3A.

In non-football related news, the IHSA took action on one recommendation presented by board member Todd Tharp, lead contact for the soccer advisory committee. Soccer matches for the upcoming season can no longer be decided by a tie. The measure was taken in order to improve the process of seeding for the state tournament.

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"If we had a tie in the past, we had to eliminate that contest from seeding at the state tournament," Tharp said. "The recommendation is we follow (NFHS) tiebreaker procedures, that during the regular season contests we play two 10-minute sudden death overtimes. If needed, finally we'd go into penalty kicks so that we have a winner of the contest."

In the interest of time, the IHSAA has given weekend tournament organizers the flexibility to come up with their own ideas for deciding winners and losers.