

Metro football teams put in districts

Written by Jim Ecker

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The suspense ended at high noon Thursday when the Iowa High School Athletic Association announced the new [district football assignment](#) s for the 2014 and 2015 campaigns.

The Xavier Saints, who are dropping from Class 4A to Class 3A next season, were placed in Class 3A District #4 with the Marion Indians, DeWitt Central, Western Dubuque, Maquoketa, Solon and Dubuque Wahlert.

Kennedy, Jefferson and Linn-Mar were assigned to Class 4A District #5 with Cedar Falls, Waterloo East and Waterloo West. All six of those teams are from the Mississippi Valley Conference.

Washington and Prairie were put in Class 4A District #6 with Burlington, Iowa City High, Muscatine and Ottumwa. Burlington and Muscatine are from the Mississippi Athletic Conference, Iowa City High is from the MVC and Ottumwa played in a Class 4A district in the western half of the state the past two years.

Xavier Coach Duane Schulte thinks the Saints will find plenty of competition at the Class 3A level. Solon reached the semifinals of the 3A playoffs last season and finished with an 11-2 record. Maquoketa reached the second round of the playoffs and went 7-3. Marion, DeWitt Central and Western Dubuque all qualified for the playoffs and finished 4-6.

"I said it before we even knew if there would be districts: 3A football is tough," said Schulte.

Xavier reached the championship game of the Class 4A playoffs in 2012 and 2013. Now the Saints will be viewed as one of the state powers in Class 3A.

All of the teams in the Mississippi Valley Conference and Mississippi Athletic Conference are switching to districts, joining the rest of the state.

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Paul James, the athletic director and football coach at Washington, welcomed the district assignments.

"It's fine," he said. "Quite a bit of travel. It's a new experience for all of us. I'll have a better feeling about the process in two years."

The Warriors will visit Burlington, Muscatine and Ottumwa in 2014 or 2015, and those schools will come to Cedar Rapids for a game in the next two seasons as well.

Prairie Coach Mike Morrissey said he's excited about the district assignments.

"I feel like we will be able to keep some of the traditional matchups we have created here over the years and also allow us some flexibility to play some teams we haven't seen before," he said. "Playing some of the MAC schools will be new for our kids and they look forward to that. We are also looking forward to seeing how everything with non-district games shakes out."

"It looks like we will be doing some traveling the next two years with Burlington and Ottumwa, but that's part of the way it works," said Morrissey. "I'm sure a lot of coaches and administrations understand that part as well. I think it's exciting and going to create some really fun football atmospheres."

Schools will be asked to express preferences for non-district games. Prairie could ask the IHSA to give it non-district games with Kennedy, Jefferson and Linn-Mar, for instance. Washington would like to continue its Metro games against Kennedy and Jefferson in non-district affairs. And Xavier would like to keep playing some of the Class 4A Metro opponents.

The top four teams in each district will advance to the playoffs. The schedules for the 2014 season will be announced later, once district games and non-district games have been decided.

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The IHSAA consulted with athletic directors from Class 4A schools before making the district assignments.

"We brought in a group of A.D.'s from the western side and eastern side to discuss the process of districting at the Class 4A level," said Todd Tharp, an assistant director of the IHSAA. "We asked for their input in providing previous regular season and postseason success, along with some success at the lower level.

"From there, we used a tiering process to kind of separate the teams by levels," he said. "Teams were defined as tier 1, tier 2 or tier 3 teams based on the criteria above," he said. "We tried to separate the schools and not have one really deep district and one that maybe was not as strong."

The 46 schools in Class 4A were placed in eight districts. Six of those districts have six teams and two of the districts have five teams, but in all cases the top four teams in each district will advance to the 32-team playoffs.

All four of the Class 4A districts on the western side of the state have six teams. By comparison, only two of the Class 4A districts on the eastern side of the state have six teams and two of the districts have five teams.

The net result of the Class 4A districts is that 16 of the 24 teams in the west will make the playoffs, and 16 of the 22 teams in the east will make the playoffs.

The IHSAA decided not to split the 46 teams in Class 4A on a 23-23 basis, opting instead for a 24-22 split for the next two-year cycle of district football. There was speculation that Marshalltown or Mason City might be moved from west to east, but that did not happen.

"We feel the districts in Class 4A on both sides of the state are very representative of what the A.D.'s were looking for," said Tharp.

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Xavier won the Class 4A state title in 2006 and reached the championship game in 2012 and 2013, but the Saints have elected to play at the Class 3A level in their proper population group. Tharp said geography played more of a role in Xavier's assignment to Class 3A District #4, rather than the school's high level of success.

"Xavier was a little different and their previous success was not looked at quite as much as what we looked at in Class 4A," said Tharp. "Geography tends to make things a little simpler at the lower levels as you do not have multiple schools in a close proximity. Again, we try not to create one very deep district, while another district may not quite have the depth."

Tharp expressed satisfaction with the entire process.

"We are quite comfortable with the direction of all our classes when placing them in districts," he remarked.

Dubuque Wahlert and Davenport Assumption are also moving from Class 4A to Class 3A. Lewis Central is climbing from Class 3A to Class 4A.

Cedar Valley Christian was placed in 8-Player District #4 with Central City, Central Elkader, Lansing Kee, Midland of Wyoming, Springville, Turkey Valley and West Central of Maynard.

The districts will be shuffled again in two years for the 2016 and 2017 campaigns.

CLASS 4A DISTRICTS

DISTRICT 1: Ames, Ankeny, Council Bluffs Jefferson, Des Moines East, Sioux City North, Southeast Polk.

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DISTRICT 2: Des Moines North, Des Moines Roosevelt, Dowling Catholic, Johnston, Lewis Central, Sioux City East.

DISTRICT 3: Ankeny Centennial, Council Bluffs Lincoln, Des Moines Hoover, Des Moines Lincoln, Sioux City West, West Des Moines Valley.

DISTRICT 4: Fort Dodge, Indianola, Marshalltown, Mason City, Urbandale, Waukee.

DISTRICT 5: Cedar Falls, Cedar Rapids Jefferson, Cedar Rapids Kennedy, Linn-Mar, Waterloo East, Waterloo West.

DISTRICT 6: Burlington, Cedar Rapids Washington, Iowa City High, Muscatine, Ottumwa, Cedar Rapids Prairie.

DISTRICT 7: Davenport Central, Davenport North, Dubuque Hempstead, Iowa City West, Pleasant Valley.

DISTRICT 8: Bettendorf, Clinton, Davenport West, Dubuque Senior, North Scott.