

IHSAA needs to fix 4A substates

Written by Jim Ecker
Saturday, 18 July 2015 17:43



When I'm the new king of the Iowa High School Athletic Association, the first thing we're going to do is fix the Class 4A substate baseball tournaments.

It's long overdue.

This business of awarding second-round byes has to end. And this business of spreading the substate tournaments over six days has to end as well to prevent teams from riding a stud pitcher all the way to the state tournament.

As it stands now, a No. 1 seed can win an opening-round game on Friday with its star pitcher, draw a second-round bye on Monday and come back with its star pitcher in the substate finals on Wednesday with plenty of rest.

Baseball is a team game and should showcase an entire pitching staff, not just one guy.

We also have to change the system so we don't put Cedar Rapids Prairie and Iowa City West, two of the best teams in our area, in the same substate. Both of those teams deserve a clean shot at making the state tournament, but that won't happen this year because they're likely to meet in the substate finals Wednesday night and one of them will be eliminated.

The four teams with the best records in eastern Iowa are Prairie (31-7), Jefferson (29-9), Iowa City West (30-11) and Kennedy (28-11). They should have been placed in four different substates and could have been if the IHSAA had waited until the last weekend of the regular season to make its assignments. Instead, Prairie and Iowa City West got lumped together in a game that shouldn't have happened until the state tournament.

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The IHSAA likes to give itself plenty of time to make the arrangements for the substate tournaments for host schools, umpire assignments and travel plans, but they don't need as much time (several weeks) as they're taking now.

Trust me, I used to run youth baseball tournaments that involved 35 or 40 teams in a single weekend and we managed to finalize those plans about a week ahead of time with no problems. The IHSAA could wait as well, in fairness to the teams.

It took me about an hour Saturday afternoon to come up with a fair system for the four Class 4A substate tournaments in eastern Iowa. I ranked the teams 1 through 24, based on current records, and awarded first-round byes to the top 8 teams. The tournament would be played on three consecutive days, forcing all the teams to use different starting pitchers and go deeper into their pitching staffs.

By ranking the teams 1 through 24 before making the brackets, it eliminates a situation where Kennedy - ranked No. 4 in my system - had an easy game against No. 24 Waterloo East in the opening round of the substate tournament Friday night, whereas No. 2 seed Jefferson had to play No. 17 North Scott.

Jefferson played poorly against North Scott and has nobody to blame but itself for losing, but fair is fair. Kennedy got a free pass (essentially) while Jefferson had a tough game.

The IHSAA could have waited until Saturday, July 11 to make the pairings and held the substate tournament on Monday, July 20 through Wednesday, July 22, giving everyone more than week to prepare.

Here are my substate groupings and first-round games, based on our system. In all cases, the

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higher seed would host:

SUBSTATE 1

GAME 1: No. 1 Prairie (31-7) draws bye
GAME 2: No. 8 Ottumwa (25-15) draws bye
GAME 3: No. 9 Cedar Falls (21-13) vs. No. 24 Waterloo East (3-37)
GAME 4: No. 16 Dubuque Senior (21-20) vs. No. 17 North Scott (18-20)

SUBSTATE 2

GAME 1: No. 2 Jefferson (29-9) draws bye
GAME 2: No. 7 Clinton (21-12) draws bye
GAME 3: No. 10 Western Dubuque (23-16) vs. No. 23 Waterloo West (3-32)
GAME 4: No. 15 Pleasant Valley (20-18) vs. No. 18 Burlington (15-17)

SUBSTATE 3

GAME 1: No. 3 Iowa City West (30-11) draws bye
GAME 2: No. 6 Davenport Central (22-11) draws bye
GAME 3: No. 11 Hempstead (20-16) vs. No. 22 Washington (7-28)
GAME 4: No. 14 Bettendorf (21-18) vs. No. 19 Marshalltown (14-17)

SUBSTATE 4

GAME 1: No. 4 Kennedy (28-11) draws bye
GAME 2: No. 5 Linn-Mar (24-11) draws bye
GAME 3: No. 12 Iowa City High (22-18) vs. No. 21 Muscatine (12-18)
GAME 4: No. 13 Davenport North (17-14) vs. No. 20 Davenport West (13-17)

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The second-round games would match the Game 1 winner against the Game 4 winner, and the Game 2 winner against the Game 3 winner. Then those winners would meet in the substate finals for a trip to the state tournament.

The three rounds could be played on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Teams could keep track of their own rankings and know if they were likely to host a first-round game or not. Umpires would be alerted in advance to the various scenarios.

There might be a few long bus rides under our system, such as Marshalltown traveling to Bettendorf, but school is out and the players don't have to wake up early the next morning. A longer bus ride would be a small price to pay to adopt a better system.

Here are the rankings with each team's current won-loss record and winning percentage, listed 1 through 24. The rankings are based strictly on won-loss records and could be adjusted slightly for a team like Western Dubuque, which plays a predominantly 3A schedule in the Wamac Conference.

| | | |
|----------------------|-------|------|
| 1. Prairie | 31-7 | .815 |
| 2. Jefferson | 29-9 | .763 |
| 3. Iowa City West | 30-11 | .731 |
| 4. Kennedy | 28-11 | .717 |
| 5. Linn-Mar | 24-11 | .685 |
| 6. Davenport Central | 22-11 | .667 |
| 7. Clinton | 21-12 | .636 |
| 8. Ottumwa | 25-15 | .625 |
| 9. Cedar Falls | 21-13 | .617 |
| 10. Western Dubuque | 23-16 | .589 |
| 11. Hempstead | 20-16 | .555 |
| 12. Iowa City High | 22-18 | .550 |
| 13. Davenport North | 17-14 | .548 |
| 14. Bettendorf | 21-18 | .538 |
| 15. Pleasant Valley | 20-18 | .526 |
| 16. Dubuque Senior | 21-20 | .512 |

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|--------------------|-------|------|
| 17. North Scott | 18-20 | .473 |
| 18. Burlington | 15-17 | .468 |
| 19. Marshalltown | 14-17 | .451 |
| 20. Davenport West | 13-17 | .433 |
| 21. Muscatine | 12-18 | .400 |
| 22. Washington | 7-28 | .200 |
| 23. Waterloo West | 3-32 | .088 |
| 24. Waterloo East | 3-37 | .075 |