

IHSAA did good work with prep football

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Iowa High School Athletic Association had a good week.

First they rejected a proposal for an eight-game regular season in prep football, which few people wanted. Then they did a good job of assigning teams to football districts, especially the new Class 4A districts in eastern Iowa.

It's not often the IHSAA gets praised for its work, but the Board of Directors and IHSAA staff members made good decisions.

The Iowa Football Coaches Association has legitimate concerns about the well-being of players who are asked to participate in four playoff games in 15 days, but trimming the regular season from nine games to eight would not have been the right answer.

The IHSAA will study the issue and perhaps make adjustments in the future, but the Board wisely passed on making a hasty decision.

The long-awaited district assignments were announced Thursday and it seemed like a lot of people were ready to howl, but there were few complaints. You can quibble here and there, but the assignments seem fair.

The Xavier Saints, who are dropping from Class 4A to 3A, were placed in a challenging district

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with Solon, Marion and three other teams that made the playoffs this fall. The mighty Saints, who have been a Class 4A power, might win that district, but it won't be a cakewalk.

Kennedy, Jefferson and Linn-Mar were placed in a mini-Mississippi Valley Conference district with Cedar Falls, Waterloo West and Waterloo East, which is not much different from an old MVC division.

Washington and Prairie were grouped together in a 4A district that includes Burlington, Ottumwa, Muscatine and Iowa City High, so there's going to be some extra travel for the Warriors and Hawks, but not that much.

At first blush, the two Class 4A districts that feature most of the Quad Cities teams appear a little weak with only five teams apiece (all the other Class 4A districts have six teams). It invites the possibility of a team with a 1-8 record making the playoffs, just like Mason City did two years ago.

There are 46 teams in Class 4A now, so the IHSAA had no choice: There had to be six districts with six teams apiece and two districts with five teams apiece. The only question was where?

Davenport Central, Davenport North, Dubuque Hempstead, Iowa City West and Pleasant Valley are in District 7. Bettendorf, Clinton, Davenport West, Dubuque Senior and North Scott are in District 8. They are "sister" districts, which makes it easier for them to play each in non-district games without somebody being left without a partner.

The IHSAA changes the districts every two years, so perhaps two other districts – in other parts of the state – will have five teams apiece to make it as fair as possible on a revolving basis.

If you're looking for a school with a legitimate complaint, consider Benton Community and its district in Class 3A. The Bobcats have been grouped with Ballard, Bondurant-Farrar, Gilbert, Grinnell, Nevada and Newton. Good luck finding some of those places on a map.

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All told, however, the IHSAA appears to have done a creditable job with the district assignments. It was a thankless task, but if you bump into any of those folks from the IHSAA, you might want to say thanks.