

Thursday night football could hurt Metro

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Cedar Rapids Washington, Kennedy and Jefferson football teams could do well on the field this season and suffer at the gate.

You can blame the new district formula in Class 4A football for that.

The Warriors, Cougars and J-Hawks all share Kingston Stadium in southwest Cedar Rapids as their home field and once the season is over they split the gate receipts evenly.

The bigger the crowd, the better the receipts, and this could be a tough year at the box office for all three clubs.

The Iowa High School Athletic Association arranged the schedules for all the teams this year and one of its guiding principles was to limit travel time on school nights. In other words, they tried to avoid having teams return home at midnight on Thursday night with school the next day.

That led to some of the most attractive Metro vs. Metro games landing on Thursday nights, when crowds figure to be smaller than on Friday nights. It successfully reduces travel on school nights, but also reduces crowds and money.

Kennedy hosts Washington on Thursday, Sept. 4. Jefferson hosts the Cougars on Thursday, Sept. 25. And Kennedy hosts Linn-Mar on Thursday, Oct. 2. Those are attractive games, but it will be harder for fans to show up those nights with things to do the next morning.

Kennedy has only two Friday home games at Kingston Stadium this season against Pleasant Valley and Waterloo West, requiring significant travel for visiting fans. There won't be any school the next day, but how many visitors do you suppose will come to Cedar Rapids for those games?

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Jefferson has three Friday home games at Kingston against Prairie, Waterloo West and Waterloo East. Only Prairie figures to bring a good number of fans to the game.

Kennedy and Jefferson have only four home games this season, but that will flip next year and they'll have five home games in 2015. Washington has five home games this year, but will have only four next year.

Washington, Kennedy and Jefferson rely on gate receipts to help fund their athletic departments, so skimpy crowds could have repercussions down the road. All three schools had to cut \$20,000 out of their budgets for extracurricular salaries this year due to budget constraints for the entire school district. More cuts could be coming.

The Warriors, Cougars and J-Hawks may want to reconsider their decision to keep the Xavier Saints off their schedules in future years. The Saints have dropped from Class 4A to 3A this year, which led to new schedules for everyone, but Washington, Kennedy and Jefferson might want to put Xavier back on the schedule as a way to make money.

It's too late for the 2015 campaign, because all the schedules are already done for next year, but there will be a new two-year cycle of schedules for 2016 and 2017.

It might make sense for Kennedy to play a home-and-away series with Xavier in 2016 and 2017, then Washington could have a home-and-away series with the Saints in 2018 and 2019, followed by Jefferson in 2020 and 2021.

The Saints want to play non-district games against their Metro brethren, but the feelings were not mutual.

Athletic directors are fond of saying they act in the best interests of their schools and their student-athletes. If they want to avoid further financial stress, they should call Xavier High School and figure it out.