

Thoughts on the new 5 class IGHSAU

Written by Scott Unash

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Last Saturday morning signaled the beginning of a new era for the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union (IGHSAU).

Starting the summer of 2012 for softball, the IGHSAU will institute a fifth class for several high school sports -- volleyball, basketball, golf and softball. Three of those sports are the key revenue builders for the IGHSAU ... here's a clue, it's not golf!

Looking at this at first blush, one may take the official line of the IGHSAU; more kids will have the experience of reaching a state tournament and the class structures will be more equitable.

But let's examine this.

I have contended for many years, and I believe it has shown in competitors' attitudes and actions, that it is not as much of a "big deal" to get to a state tournament as it once was. This trend began with the institution of the AAU, USSSA and club volleyball teams that kids begin to play around the age of seven or eight. Routinely these kids travel around the state, the region and, in cases of elite all-star teams, around the country to attend tournaments and play games.

After you've been to Las Vegas and Phoenix, driving to Des Moines on a school bus doesn't seem quite so glamorous, even though it's easier to get there than it ever has been. Teams that in the past had to win four or five games to get to a state competition now, more often than not, need only win two games to earn a ticket to Des Moines, or wherever the aforementioned competition is held. Communities don't seem to rally around the teams or kids as much as they once did.

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As far as the new classes being equitable in terms of enrollments, that also is not going to improve a great deal. In the new 5A class, which will include the top 40 schools in enrollment, you will still go from a school the size of West Des Moines Valley down to a school such as Prairie for example, a difference of many hundreds of kids. There also will be wide disparities in the other four classes.

With schools continuing to consolidate around the state, I propose it's time to drop down to three classes in many sports. Leave the top 64 schools in 3A and divide the rest in half. State Tournaments will be more relevant for kids and communities.

We also will avoid the prospect of having games at the girls state basketball tournament starting at 9 a.m. They start at 10 a.m. now, which is way too early. Not only will the day start earlier, but it will end later, perhaps as late as 11 p.m., trying to squeeze five classes into a six day event!

HEARTY CONGRATULATIONS -- Kudos goes out to all the Metro place winners last weekend at the state track meet, boys and girls. It was another banner year topped off by four Metro boys teams finishing in the top 10 of the 4A meet. I believe that is a first in Metro track history. Everyone should take a victory lap for that accomplishment!