

IHSAA needs to smile on Metro baseball

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 20 June 2015 19:27 - Last Updated Saturday, 20 June 2015 19:34



This has developed into a special year for high school baseball in the Metro area with Jefferson, Linn-Mar, Prairie and Kennedy all worthy of trips to the Class 4A state tournament next month.

Now it's time for the Iowa High School Athletic Association to give them all a fair chance of making it to Principal Park in Des Moines.

Let's jump to the bottom line: The IHSAA should put Jefferson, Linn-Mar, Prairie and Kennedy in different substate tournaments so none of them would bump heads prior to the state tournament.

That does not mean all four teams would make it to Des Moines, but it means all four would have a clean shot.

This column is not meant as a sentimental plea in favor of the local clubs. Rather, it's an attempt to demonstrate that all four teams are among the best in the state and deserve a fair chance to prove it.

First, a little education: There are 48 teams in Class 4A baseball. They will be divided into eight substates with six teams apiece, with four substates in the eastern part of the state and four substates in the western part.

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If you examine the 24 teams in the east, it's clear that Jefferson, Linn-Mar, Prairie and Kennedy are easily among the best teams in Cedar Rapids, Davenport, Iowa City, Waterloo, Dubuque and anyone else. In fact, they may be THE best of them all.

Look at the rankings, which are conducted by the Iowa High School Baseball Coaches Association: Jefferson is ranked No. 4, Linn-Mar is No. 7, Prairie is No. 8 and Kennedy is No. 10. Iowa City West is No. 9, but that was before the Trojans lost doubleheaders to Iowa City West and Kennedy this past week.

All the other ranked teams are from the west with No. 1 Johnston, No. 2 Waukee, No. 3 Southeast Polk, No. 5 Dowling and No. 6 Sioux City East.

Now look at the team records (as listed on the IHSAA website): Jefferson is 16-4, clearly the best mark in eastern Iowa among 4A schools. Linn-Mar and Prairie are 12-4, tied for the second-best mark. Kennedy has the fourth-best record at 11-4.

There are other contenders at this point with Dubuque Hempstead (13-5), Cedar Falls (10-4), Davenport Central (9-3), North Scott (8-4), Iowa City High (11-6), Western Dubuque (13-8) and Iowa City West (13-9), but they don't stack up to Jefferson, Linn-Mar, Prairie and Kennedy at this point.

Here's why this is important now: The IHSAA will reveal the substate groupings this week, based on results through June 20. They will not reveal the pairings - that will come in two weeks - but they will reveal which teams are in each substate.

If Jefferson, Linn-Mar, Prairie and Kennedy are assigned to four different substates, it means all four schools would have an equal chance of earning a trip to the state tournament. If two of them are assigned to the same

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substate, they would meet in a substate game and somebody would be eliminated.

Jefferson Coach Kyle Rodenkirk said it best Friday night when he was talking about some of the best baseball in eastern Iowa. "People in the area, if they love baseball, they better get out and watch them, because it's right in our back yard," he remarked.

The IHSAA uses a mathematical formula for picking the substates, which is a fair way to do it. Let's just hope the official numbers support what's been happening on the field.

It would be a special treat to see Jefferson, Linn-Mar, Prairie and Kennedy all competing in the Class 4A state tournament On July 29, July 31 and Aug. 1.

Let's hope the IHSAA makes it possible.