

## IHSAA did good job with football districts

Written by Jim Ecker

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Some of us are quick to criticize the Iowa High School Athletic Association when they do something that appears slightly askew, so it's only fair to applaud them when they do something right.

And when it comes to the new assignments for district football, the IHSAA got it right.

The state association treated our Metro teams very fairly with the district assignments that were announced this past week. And even though the playoff field has been cut in half for the 2016 and 2017 campaign, most of our teams should have a good shot at making the postseason tournament.

There are no head-shakers in the assignments and no districts where it's obvious that somebody got a raw deal.

Let's start with District 8 in Class 4A, where the Kennedy Cougars were rewarded for their remarkable season this fall when they marched all the way to the state finals and finished with a 13-1 record.

Nobody else in District 8 had a winning record in 2015, although several teams came close. Ottumwa went 4-5, Prairie and Linn-Mar finished 4-6, Iowa City West went 4-7 and Burlington was 1-8.

Prairie, Linn-Mar and Iowa City West made the playoffs, but only Iowa City West won a postseason game.

Kennedy will suffer heavy graduation losses - good-bye Shaun Beyer, Tyler Dralle and most of the offensive line - but the Cougars should have another competitive team in 2016. Things can

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change dramatically in high school football from year to year, but it's probably safe to say that Kennedy, Prairie and Linn-Mar will have a decent chance of claiming the two playoff spots from their district.

The Washington Warriors are the heavyweights in District 5 in Class 4A after reaching the quarterfinals of the playoffs and finishing with a fine 10-2 record. Based on early projections, the Jefferson J-Hawks (7-4) and Cedar Falls Tigers (6-4) could be battling Washington for the two playoff berths from a district that also includes Waterloo West (3-6), Mason City (1-8) and Waterloo East (0-9).

Washington, Jefferson and Cedar Falls made the playoffs this season, but Waterloo West, Mason City and Waterloo East did not.

The IHSAA tinkered with Class 3A for the next two years in terms of the district format. Instead of eight districts with seven teams apiece, there now will be seven districts with eight teams apiece. The top two teams from each district will make the playoffs, along with two wild-card teams from around the state to fill the 16-team bracket.

The Xavier Saints (9-1) should be able to compete for the two playoff spots from District 3 in Class 3A, although there certainly are several legitimate contenders for those berths.

South Tama compiled a flashy 11-1 record last year in Class 2A and has jumped to Class 3A for the next two seasons. Decorah (6-5) eliminated Xavier from the playoffs last year and is always tough, while Independence (8-2) and Waverly-Shell Rock (6-4) should be in the hunt again. The district also includes Benton Community (5-5), Charles City (3-6) and Vinton-Shellsburg (3-6).

The Marion Indians face a tough task in District 4 in Class 3A after finishing with an 0-9 record in 2015, stretching their losing streak to 17 games in a row. Whoever succeeds Tony Perkins as head coach has a big rebuilding job with the Indians and it's unlikely they'll be in position to compete for a playoff spot in a district that includes West Delaware (12-1) and Davenport Assumption (9-3).

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The other teams in District 4 are Maquoketa (7-4), Clear Creek Amana (5-5), Center Point-Urbana (4-5), Dubuque Wahlert (3-7) and DeWitt Central (1-8).

The IHSAA made another good decision when it voted to adopt brackets for all the playoff fields, so teams and fans can see what it will take to advance each step of the way. In recent years, the IHSAA did not announce the pairings until each round was done, so was impossible to know who your team would play if they won.

The IHSAA has made some questionable decisions over the years, and some people insist there's a conspiracy to reward Des Moines metropolitan schools and short-change everyone else, but the Metro schools in Cedar Rapids and Marion have nothing to complain about this time.