

Saints nixed for U.S. Cellular Center

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 08 February 2016 18:59 - Last Updated Monday, 08 February 2016 20:12



The Xavier boys basketball team was thrown an unexpected curve Monday.

If the Saints reach the Class 3A substate finals, they'll play the championship game at Iowa City West instead of at the U.S. Cellular Center in downtown Cedar Rapids.

There will be a Class 3A doubleheader at the U.S. Cellular Center for the substate finals Feb. 29, but the Saints have been assigned to a substate final with southern schools that feeds into Iowa City instead of Cedar Rapids.

"It's not what I expected," Xavier Coach Ryan Luehrsmann said Monday afternoon. "I was a little bummed by that. I'm sure the kids are a little disappointed, too."

Luehrsmann quickly pivoted, saying he likes the bracket he's in - there are no roadblocks like Dubuque Wahlert or Waverly-Shell Rock possibly blocking their path to the state tournament - and he said playing at Iowa City West would be OK if the Saints are fortunate enough to reach the substate finals.

"We'll be fine with it," he said. "It's a good venue in its own right. I guess it's more of a mid-point, if you're looking at it with the southern schools."

The Iowa High School Athletic Association wanted to stage Class 3A substate finals at the McLeod Center in Cedar Falls and the U.S. Cellular Center in Cedar Rapids, but the IHSAA was not able to book the McLeod Center. That set off a chain reaction that pushed northern schools toward the U.S. Cellular Center and pushed Xavier toward Iowa City.

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"That's totally it," said Brett Nanninga, an associate director of the IHSAA who arranged the substate sites. "This time it worked out that Xavier is going to have to go south and we'll bring some other schools to the U.S. Cellular Center. We think that's the reasonable thing to do."

Substate 3 and Substate 4 in Class 3A will hold their championship games in Cedar Rapids.

Substate 3 features second-ranked Dubuque Wahlert and ninth-ranked Waverly-Shell Rock, along with Charles City, Crestwood, Decorah, Independence, West Delaware and Marion. Two of those schools - probably Wahlert and Waverly - will battle for the Substate 3 title in Cedar Rapids.

Substate 4 does not have any ranked teams and features Maquoketa, Davenport Assumption, Solon, DeWitt Central, Mount Vernon, Vinton-Shellsburg, Benton Community and Center Point-Urbana. Two of those schools will meet for the Substate 4 title in Cedar Rapids.

The Saints are in Substate 5 and will face Williamsburg in the tournament opener at home. The other schools in Substate 5 are Clear Creek Amana, Washington (Iowa), Mount Pleasant, Fairfield, Fort Madison and Keokuk. Two of those teams - probably Xavier and Mount Pleasant - will meet for the Substate 5 title at Iowa City West, which would mean a fairly equal drive for both teams.

Xavier won its game in the Class 3A substate finals at the U.S. Cellular Center last year and proceeded to finish third at the state tournament. Luehrsmann would have welcomed another trip to the same arena, but he took a philosophical approach to the assignments.

"It would have been nice, but it's an imperfect world," he remarked. "At least we got a favorable bracket to be in, without Waverly or Wahlert. You take what you get, right?"

The Class 4A assignments were a different story for the Metro schools. Linn-Mar, Kennedy, Jefferson, Washington and Prairie would all get a chance to play in the substate finals as part of

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a 4A doubleheader at the U.S. Cellular Center on Tuesday, March 1 if they get that far.

The IHSAA wanted to hold two of the Class 4A substate finals in the McLeod Center on March 1, but the Association could not get the UNI arena for that night either. That may have worked in Linn-Mar's favor, as it turned out.

Cedar Falls is the No. 1 seed in Substate 3 and Linn-Mar is the No. 2 seed in the same substate, with Waterloo West, Kennedy, Waterloo East and Marshalltown also in the same bracket. If the McLeod Center had been available, their substate finals might have been held in Cedar Falls - right down the street from Cedar Falls High School - instead of Cedar Rapids.

The Substate 6 finals also will be held at the U.S. Cellular Center with second-ranked Iowa City West the heavy favorite in that bracket. Jefferson, Washington, Iowa City High, Prairie and Ottumwa are also in Substate 6.

Jefferson and Washington will meet each other in the opening round of the substate tournament Feb. 22 at Prairie. The Prairie Hawks will meet Ottumwa in the second game that night at Prairie.

Kennedy will play Waterloo West in the substate opener at Waterloo East Feb. 22. Linn-Mar drew a first-round bye and will host Waterloo East or Marshalltown in the semifinals.

Marion will play West Delaware in the opening round of the Class 3A tournament at Dubuque Wahlert Feb. 22.

Xavier will host Williamsburg in the opening round of the Class 3A tournament Feb. 22 in the second game of a doubleheader that also features Clear Creek Amana against Washington (Iowa) in the opener. The winners will meet at Prairie Feb. 25 before proceeding to the substate finals at Iowa City West Feb. 29.

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CLASS 3A PAIRINGS

DISTRICT 9

Monday, Feb. 22

G1: Clear Creek Amana vs Washington, at Xavier, 6:30 p.m.

G2: Williamsburg at Xavier, 8 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 25

G3: Game 1 winner vs Game 2 winner, at Prairie, 7 p.m.

DISTRICT 6

Monday, Feb. 22

G1: Marion vs West Delaware, at Dubuque Wahlert, 6:30 p.m.

G2: Independence at Dubuque Wahlert, 8 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 25

G3: G1 winner vs Game 2 winner, at Epworth, 7 p.m.

CLASS 4A

SUBSTATE 3

Monday, Feb. 22

Kennedy vs Waterloo West, at Waterloo East, 6:30 p.m.

Marshalltown at Waterloo East, 8 p.m.

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Friday, Feb. 26

Kennedy/Waterloo West at Cedar Falls, 7 p.m.

Marshalltown/Waterloo East at Linn-Mar, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, March 1

Substate Finals, U.S. Cellular Center, 6:30 p.m.

SUBSTATE 6

Monday, Feb. 22

Jefferson vs Washington, at Prairie, 6:30 p.m.

Ottumwa at Prairie, 8 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 26

Jefferson/Washington at Iowa City West, 7 p.m.

Prairie/Ottumwa at Iowa City High, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, March 1

Substate Finals, U.S. Cellular Center, 8 p.m.