

Class 4A district football is bad idea

Written by Mark Dukes

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It has been nearly 40 years since the playoffs were introduced to high school football, and many changes have been made to the system by the Iowa High School Athletic Association.

Now the IHSAA is looking to create a district format for the state's largest football class (4A). The state is asking for input from athletics directors and coaches and either has or will conduct meetings with conferences. The IHSAA will have representatives present Wednesday in Cedar Falls when the Mississippi Valley Conference ADs convene.

Sometimes I wish people would just leave well enough alone.

While nothing is yet certain, the 4A district concept would include about 44 schools. Some districts would have six teams, others would have five. If the 32-team playoff system is retained, that would mean four district qualifiers in each of eight districts.

Locally, a logical district would include Jefferson, Kennedy, Linn-Mar, Prairie and Washington. Because of its enrollment, Xavier would drop to Class 3A with Marion and be absorbed into a 3A district.

This obviously means the death of conference competition. It also means schools must find four or five non-district opponents, which in the case of the MVC could mean playing some of the old rivals. Or it could mean picking up a game or two against teams in the Quad Cities.

The IHSAA should have stopped in 1984 when it increased to 16 the number of playoff teams in each class. It was eight qualifiers from 1975 until '84. Then in 2008, it was announced that 32 teams in each class would make the postseason.

Sixteen is just about the right number of qualifiers; 32 is far too many. The system is now diluted

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with many first-round matchups turning into mismatches. Last year in 4A, seven of the 16 first-round games were decided by 7 points or fewer. In the other nine games, the average margin of victory was 32.6 points.

Oh, there are exceptions, like Kennedy last year. The Cougars started slow but gained health and momentum, winning two playoff games and forging into the state quarterfinals. But that scenario is going to be played out randomly.

The thrill and challenge of making the postseason in football is over. No one can convince me otherwise that a 5-4 or 4-5 team that makes the playoffs, then gets drilled in the first round, is going to be talking about that for years to come. Qualifying for the postseason should be special, and it isn't anymore in Iowa football.

But rest assured, 4A district football is on its way. The IHSAA doesn't float a concept and ask for input without knowing full well it is going to move ahead.

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