

Championship season blackout?

Written by Scott Unash

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The championship season in Iowa high school athletics starts this weekend with the state swimming meet at Marshalltown.

After that the wrestlers take center stage in Des Moines, followed by the girls and boys state basketball tournaments. Also, the top bowlers in the state will be shooting for their titles.

Going back many decades these tournament finals (wrestling, girls and boys basketball) have been televised across the state of Iowa, giving people an opportunity to watch the top preps perform their magic.

But, that may not be the case this year.

Each year the Iowa High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) and the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union (IGHSAU), through the Iowa High School Sports Network (IHSSN), put up for bid the rights to broadcast the state tournament winter series.

In the past few years, Fox 28 has been the eastern Iowa provider showing the finals of the girls and boys basketball tournaments, while the wrestling finals have varied from station to station. The one thing that has remained a constant is that all events were available to the public, whether over the air, through cable systems or on satellite.

This winter, KCRG TV has acquired the rights for the wrestling and basketball finals from the IHSSN, but the broadcasts will not be available to all of the public. KCRG announced that the wrestling finals and the Class 1A and 2A boys and girls basketball championship games will be broadcast on Channel 9.2, instead of Channel 9. The Class 3A and 4A girls and boys title games will be broadcast by Channel 9.

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I admire that KCRG is diving headfirst into the world of high school sports in eastern Iowa. While I don't agree with every decision that they have made about their coverage, from my radio standpoint or from a school standpoint, I think it's great they are airing games through the winter.

My concern is the decision to air the games on Channel 9.2. While there certainly are more people that can receive the 9.2 signal than ever before, many homes still cannot. Channel 9.2 is not available on all cable systems around eastern Iowa and also is not available for both Direct TV and Dish Network customers. So unless these viewers pick up the old school "rabbit ears," they will not be able to view the games that air on Channel 9.2.

This problem does not lie completely with KCRG. I believe the IHSAA and the IGHS AU should step in and tell KCRG that they need to run all of the finals on Channel 9. According to the IHSSN, eastern Iowa is the only quadrant of the state where the coverage will not be available to all customers.

This is wrong and should be rectified. High School Championships need to be treated in the highest regard and placed on a platform where all people can enjoy the broadcast.

We need to keep alive for another generation the great memories of Mark Zelich and Frosty Mitchell covering the basketball championships, as well as hearing the voice of the great Ed Winger announcing the wrestling place-winners for so many, many years. New memories from the Wells Fargo Arena shouldn't be lost because of a decision to relegate coverage to a television company's sub-channel.

Both KCRG, as well as the two high school governing bodies, need to work together to ensure that winter high school sports championships remain a winter viewing tradition for all Iowans.

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