

Wrestling with a problem

Written by Scott Unash

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This week marks the annual "eight-ring circus" coming to the capitol city.

It's the annual state wrestling tournament, by far the top tournament in all of the land. The annual run begins Thursday and has been condensed from four to three days, which leads to our topic of the day.

While Wednesday used to be the first day of the tournament, the state dual meet wrestling tournament will be contested on that day instead.

As you recall, the dual tournament, through last year, was conducted in Cedar Rapids and was held the weekend after the traditional individual tournament in Des Moines.

The state duals always played "little brother" to the traditional tournament. And with the US Cellular Center -- the former venue for the duals -- closed for renovation, the Iowa High School Athletic Association decided it was a perfect time to make changes to the format and site of the tournament. So this year the date and site was changed to Des Moines and the day prior to the traditional state tournament.

Good idea or not? That is the question that will be talked about for the next several days among athletes, coaches and fans alike.

Many coaches, including most in the Metro area, have voiced their displeasure over the timing of the dual tournament. Some wrestlers may have three matches the day before starting the traditional tournament on Thursday. Potential opponents not only will *not* be wrestling on Wednesday, but could possibly sit in the stands and scout the moves and strategy of their opponents.

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While I commend the IHSAA for trying to solve the problem of the timing of the state duals, I believe it is still not on the correct date for all involved. The question remains then, what is the right time of the year for the dual tournament?

Having a dual tournament earlier in the year would be a solution, but you may not be able to hold it on a Saturday. Teams already are scheduled to compete in meets, including their own invitationals. It is not likely schools would want to give up the top teams from their school tournaments, or their own tournaments, to compete at the dual tournament. Having it a week after the season also did not appear to be a good choice since wrestlers had to make weight for another week.

My best solution would be to have the top eight teams in each of the three classes picked for a dual tournament on a Tuesday in Des Moines during the middle of the month of January. While it would make for a busy and hectic week for the competing teams, with a Saturday tournament the weekend before and probably later that week, as well as a regular Thursday conference meet, it may be the best solution. Right now the top 16 schools in each class are picked to wrestle in a regional tournament to set up the dual tournament field. This step would be eliminated and you would start with eight in Des Moines on a Tuesday.

Is this the best solution? Who knows? I think it beats watching a lot of teams put non-starters on the mat throughout Wednesday, which is what it looks like may happen with many of the top squads keeping an eye on the prize -- a traditional state meet title.

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