

State volleyball tournament will stay in C.R.

Written by Jim Ecker

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WEST DES MOINES - The girls state volleyball tournament will be staying in Cedar Rapids for at least five more years.

The Board of Directors of the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union (IGHSAU) unanimously approved a new contract Saturday morning that tacks a year onto the old contract and accommodates Cedar Rapids while the U.S. Cellular Center is under repair.

The 2012 state tournament will be held at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena this Nov. 7-10 for the second straight year before returning to the U.S. Cellular Center in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Cedar Rapids officials, including Mayor Ron Corbett, have agreed to waive the rental fee at the Ice Arena in 2012 and at the U.S. Cellular Center in 2013 and 2014, according to Mike Dick, the executive director of the IGHSAU.

The IGHSAU will pay 50 percent of the normal rental fee at the U.S. Cellular Center in 2015 and pay the full amount of approximately \$27,000 in 2016.

Cedar Rapids officials offered inducements to keep the state volleyball tournament and not risk losing it to another city. The IGHSAU will receive complimentary hotel rooms in Cedar Rapids as part of the new contract, and Cedar Rapids also agreed to drop its fee of 32 cents per ticket sold.

"We thought it was extremely generous on their part to come up with that kind of offer," Dick told IGHSAU board members during Saturday's meeting at the Sheraton in West Des Moines.

The state volleyball tournament has been held in Cedar Rapids since 1991 and has generated millions of dollars for the community. The tournament was held at the U.S. Cellular Center from 1991 through 2010 before moving on a temporary basis to the Ice Arena last November due to

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renovation at the U.S. Cellular Center.

The Cellular Center originally was scheduled to reopen in time for the state tournament this November, but the arena will not be ready. The IGHS AU could have held Cedar Rapids in breach of contract, but instead decided to negotiate a new contract.

The IGHS AU received a favorable response from participants and fans after the 2011 tournament was held at the Ice Arena. Players and fans enjoyed the cozy environment, and fans appreciated all the free parking at the arena in southwest Cedar Rapids.

"It worked very, very well," said Dick. "That uncertainty is gone."

Dick said he was "very comfortable" with holding the tournament at the Ice Arena again this year, but the clear preference is staging the event at the bigger U.S. Cellular Center with its adjacent hotel and new convention center that is under construction in downtown Cedar Rapids.

Dick said the state volleyball tournament is an important event to Cedar Rapids and said he appreciates the cooperation of Cedar Rapids officials in finding a workable solution.

The state tournament will be increasing in size from four classes to five classes this year, a change that was approved last year by the IGHS AU and was not related to holding the tournament in Cedar Rapids.

The current contract between the IGHS AU and Cedar Rapids was scheduled to expire after the 2015 tournament. Dick said Cedar Rapids officials wanted a new 10-year contract, but the IGHS AU preferred to tack one year onto the existing deal and make it a new five-year contract that will expire after the 2016 event.

Dick said Cedar Rapids officials have approved the new contract. "They're in agreement with

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us," he said.