

## State wrestling duals will keep same date

Written by Jim Ecker

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The state dual meet wrestling tournament, mired in controversy the past two years, will be held the day before the traditional state tournament again in 2014 and is likely to stay in the same spot for at least several years after that.

Prairie wrestling coach Blake Williams and Linn-Mar coach Doug Streicher, among others, would like to see the state dual meet tournament switched to another date to avoid putting some wrestlers at a competitive disadvantage.

That's not likely to happen anytime soon. Both wrestling tournaments will continue to be piggy-backed at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines for the near future, IHSA executive director Alan Beste said Tuesday during a stop in Cedar Rapids.

"If we made a change, we would have to look at least two or three years (in the future) so that schools would have a chance to adjust their schedules," he said.

The IHSA has cleared Linn-Mar and Prairie of any possible wrongdoing at the 2013 state dual meet tournament that was held in February. Both coaches elected to withhold many of their top wrestlers on Wednesday and save them for the traditional tournament that was held Thursday through Saturday, fearing possible injuries and/or a competitive disadvantage.

Beste said "concerns" had been raised about Linn-Mar and Prairie, but he said the IHSA is satisfied both schools met the allowable criteria for withholding varsity wrestlers from competition. Neither program will be penalized.

The IHSA investigated both programs and asked both schools to document why some top wrestlers did not compete in the dual meet tournament. No medical documentation was required for wrestlers who may have been unhealthy enough to compete on Wednesday, but then healthy enough to compete on Thursday.

"We trust the integrity of the people running the program," said Beste. "If they think holding him

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out on Wednesday is in his best interests, we're going to go with that. We're not going to question that."

The IHSAA sent a letter to all of the coaches in the state dual meet tournament prior to the event, instructing them to use their top wrestlers or face possible sanctions, including the possibility of being banned from future tournaments. That letter disturbed some coaches, but Streicher and Williams continued to maintain they would act in the best interest of their athletes.

The IHSAA set four criteria for withholding a wrestler from competition, with a chronic injury the most prominent on the list.

Beste said the IHSAA has a multi-year contract with Wells Fargo Arena to hold the two state tournaments on Wednesday through Saturday. The state dual meet tournament had been held in Cedar Rapids, but that changed after the 2011 event due to remodeling work at the U.S. Cellular Center.

Beste said the IHSAA has annual conversations with the Cedar Rapids Convention & Visitors Bureau about holding events in Cedar Rapids, including the state dual meet tournament, but at this time there are no plans to move the wrestling tournament back to Cedar Rapids.

Beste acknowledged that the same issues could arise with the state dual meet tournament next year if coaches elect to withhold their best wrestlers. "I think it's a possibility we could have the same scenario," he said.

Some coaches have suggested moving the state dual meet tournament to a Saturday in January and make it a separate event. Beste said it's a tough issue, due to crowded school calendars.

"It's a complex situation and it does not have an easy answer," he said.

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Beste acknowledged it is more convenient for the IHSAA to hold both wrestling tournaments in the same place at the same time, but said the organization would continue to consider other options and ideas.

He also said it is more profitable for the IHSAA to hold back-to-back tournaments, but denied it's a "money grab" to do it this way.

"But we are an entity that has bills that we have to pay," he said. "So do we have to look at the bottom line? Certainly, we do have to look at the bottom line."

Beste said the IHSAA wants to help promote the sport of wrestling, both the dual meet tournament and the individual tournament.

"What's best for wrestling?" he asked. "Nobody can agree."