

Metro wrestling coaches don't like change in state duals

Written by Jim Ecker

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Metro wrestling coaches had an interesting response Wednesday after learning of a big change in the State Dual Meet Tournament.

To a man, they don't like it.

The Iowa High School Athletic Association announced Wednesday that the State Dual Meet Tournament is leaving Cedar Rapids and will be held at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines in conjunction with the Traditional State Wrestling Tournament in 2012.

The dual meet tournament will be held on Wednesday, Feb. 15 and the traditional tournament will be held the following three days on Thursday through Saturday, Feb. 16-18. Previously, the dual meet tournament was held a week after the traditional tournament.

Under the new format, the traditional state tournament will be reduced from four days to three days at Wells Fargo Arena.

Linn-Mar Coach Doug Streicher, Prairie Coach Blake Williams, Jefferson Coach Dick Briggs and Kennedy Coach Brent Paulson all like the idea of shrinking the traditional state tournament to three days, but they all strongly dislike the idea of holding the dual meet tournament on the day before the traditional tournament begins.

All four coaches said it's a question of fairness. Some wrestlers will be asked to compete on four straight days (if their teams qualify for the state duals) while other wrestlers will compete on only three straight days (if their teams do not qualify for the state duals).

"I think it's a very unfair advantage that some of those kids are going to have that aren't wrestling on Wednesday," Streicher said. "I'm not liking it one bit.

"It makes no sense to me to put the kids in that situation. There are some kids that probably won't win a state title individually because of what they're going to be put through on Wednesday."

The wrestlers who compete on Wednesday in the state duals could have three matches that day. The coaches said they could get hurt and jeopardize their chances in the traditional tournament. In addition, they'd have to make weight a day earlier than some of their competitors.

Streicher said he might withhold one of his top wrestlers from competition on Wednesday to save him for the traditional tournament, especially if he felt his team had little chance of winning the state dual meet tournament. This year, for instance, Linn-Mar had to face powerful Waverly-Shell Rock in the first round of the state duals and lost badly.

"If I had some kids that had a chance of winning the state tournament and I knew we weren't going to win the dual, I wouldn't put them in a dual meet on Wednesday. I'd rest him," he said.

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A wrestler who qualifies for both tournaments could be confronted with nine matches in four days, against some of the top competition in the state. He might have to wrestle on Wednesday night, then have to weigh-in again early Thursday.

"Boy, that's asking a lot," Williams said. "That's quite a disadvantage for teams that are at the state duals. There's no doubt about it. Odds are, there's probably going to be an injury. Boy, that would be hard to take."

All four Metro coaches have a solution: Hold the state dual meet tournament in January, several weeks before the traditional state tournament, to avoid problems. "I think it would be better served to have it (the state duals) in the middle of the season," Briggs said.

The state duals were held in Cedar Rapids since 1994 at the U.S. Cellular Center. The arena will not be available in 2012 due to construction and remodeling, but IHSAA officials said that was not the primary reason for moving the event to Des Moines.

State officials say moving the state duals to a bigger arena in Des Moines means all eight teams that qualify for the tournament will be able to compete in three matches, with wrestle-backs for fifth place and seventh place added to the schedule. That was not possible at the U.S. Cellular Center.

State officials also say the changes announced Wednesday have the support of the Wrestling Coaches Advisory Committee. None of the Metro coaches serve on that committee. Streicher thinks the majority of coaches support the idea of having three matches at the state duals, but doubts many coaches like the idea of holding the tournament on Wednesday.

"I would think a lot of coaches are not in favor of it. I'm not," he said, "and a lot of the ones I've talked to are not."

Cedar Rapids officials offered the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena as a possible temporary home for the state dual tournament in 2012 while the U.S. Cellular Center is under construction. Instead, the IHSAA moved everything to Des Moines and there's no sign the state duals will return to Cedar Rapids.

"That's too bad for Cedar Rapids, that's for sure," Williams said. "That was a good thing that Cedar Rapids had going for it. It brought a lot of money into Cedar Rapids."

All of the Metro coaches who were interviewed by the Metro Sports Report like the idea of condensing the traditional state tournament from four days to three days. There will be fewer sessions and less time between sessions, keeping fans in the arena.

"I think that place is going to be rocking. I really do," Paulson said. "I think it's going to be sold out for those early sessions. I think it's going to be a great atmosphere."

Briggs said the individual state tournament was expanded from three days to four days while Veterans Memorial Auditorium, the former home of the tournament, was under construction.

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"Four days was ridiculous," he said. "That was a money-grabber, in my opinion, by the association."

Williams strongly favors a three-day tournament as well. "It was too long and too expensive," he said. "To keep a team down there for four days -- even five sometimes -- it gets to be too much. The three days will be a bonus."

The format for qualifying for the state dual meet tournament will be changed as well. Starting next year, 16 teams will compete in a regional qualifying tournament on Tuesday, Feb. 7, with eight winners advancing to the state tournament on Feb. 15. The association will use the wrestling coaches association poll to determine which 16 teams get to compete, according to an e-mail sent to the coaches.

"It all of a sudden makes those rankings a lot more important," Briggs said.

In previous years, teams that finished first and second at eight Class 3A district tournaments advanced to regional tournaments, which narrowed the field to eight teams for state.

Alan Beste, the assistant executive director at the IHSAA, supported all of Wednesday's changes in a press release. "These changes are good for high school wrestling in Iowa," he said.

He said the new format will reduce travel time and reduce the need for wrestlers to make weight after the traditional state tournament and before the dual state tournament, as was the case this year.