

Cedar Rapids Jefferson wrestling coach Dick Briggs is a mild-mannered guy who rarely complains, but he's upset with the way the Class 3A regional dual meet tournaments were organized this year.

First of all, he thinks the J-Hawks were short-changed when they dropped from No. 5 to No. 9 in the IWCOA dual team rankings that were used to determine which schools would host a regional tournament on Feb. 10. The top-eight teams in the rankings get to host, so Jefferson missed by one spot.

Secondly, he's disappointed his J-Hawks would have to defeat fifth-ranked Johnston in the regional finals at Johnston in order to claim a berth in the state dual meet tournament. Normally, a team seeded No. 9 would face the No. 8 seed in the regional finals, but the Iowa High School Athletic Association did not follow the chart.

The Iowa Wrestling Coaches Association (IWCOA) made the rankings, then the Iowa High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) made the pairings that were released last month.

Briggs did not like either result and has not gotten any satisfactory answers.

The J-Hawks were ranked No. 5 in the IWCOA dual team rankings on Dec. 18 and they were No. 6 in The Predicament dual team rankings on Jan. 7, but they fell to No. 9 in the new IWCOA rankings on Jan. 21. The Predicament rankings are done by the publication itself, while the IWCOA rankings are done by the coaches.

"I was disappointed with the coaches and with the ranking we got," Briggs said. "We dropped three spots, and all three teams we had beaten during the season. It was in tournaments, but they hadn't beaten us at all."

Dubuque Hempstead, Johnston, Kennedy and Waverly-Shell Rock jumped ahead of Jefferson into the top eight in the critical IWCOA rankings on Jan. 21 and will get to host regional tournaments. Host schools receive first-round byes in the regional and head straight to the regional finals, while the other 16 teams in the tournament (like Jefferson) have to wrestle in the semifinals to earn a spot in the finals.

The J-Hawks think they should have been ranked in the top-8 and served as one of the hosts, instead of having to make a two-hour bus ride to Johnston on a school night and potentially face the No. 5 Dragons in the finals. At the very least, the J-Hawks think they should have been assigned to the regional being hosted by No. 8 Waverly-Shell Rock.

"I'm not very happy at all," said Briggs.

Jefferson will meet No. 24 Dowling Catholic in the regional semifinals, with the winner facing Johnston.

Jefferson lost to Hempstead in a dual meet and also finished behind Hempstead in Jefferson's own tournament, so the J-Hawks cannot complain about being ranked lower than the Mustangs (although they finished ahead of Hempstead at the Mississippi Valley Conference meet this past Saturday).

Johnston, Kennedy and Waverly-Shell Rock are another matter.

Jefferson finished ahead of Johnston and Waverly-Shell Rock at the West Des Moines Valley tournament and the J-Hawks finished ahead of Kennedy and Waverly-Shell Rock at the Keith Young Invitational in Cedar Falls. But

according to the IWCOA rankings, Johnston is No. 5, Kennedy is No. 7, Waverly-Shell Rock is No. 8 and Jefferson is No. 9.

Jefferson finished ahead of Kennedy again at the MVC meet, but that was after the regional pairings were announced.

Johnston (18-2), Kennedy (10-1) and Waverly-Shell Rock (15-3) all had better dual meet records than Jefferson (9-3) when the IWCOA rankings were released on Jan. 21, but Jefferson's only losses were to No. 4 Hempstead, No. 6 Prairie and to a team from Minnesota. Kennedy's only loss was to Prairie, but the Cougars have not faced Hempstead in a dual meet.

In many cases, those dual meet records are questionable because most of the results were not against common opponents. Some teams have tougher schedules than other teams, resulting in more losses along the way.

Briggs thinks the wrestling coaches did not dig deep enough into the results to accurately judge the relative merits of all the teams in question. He suspects they looked at final scores and records, without doing enough research.

Jefferson hosts Kennedy in a conference dual meet Thursday night, giving the J-Hawks another chance to beat the Cougars, but a victory against Kennedy will not alter the regional assignments.

"It might make me feel better, but it doesn't mean anything in terms of the state," Briggs said. "It won't change anything."

Jefferson has six wrestlers who are ranked in the top 10 by The Predicament compared to four for Kennedy, another indication that the J-Hawks might have a stronger team than the Cougars.

Briggs knows the J-Hawks have to accept their assignment and prepare for the trip to Johnston next week, hoping to turn their suspected raw deal
into a berth in the state dual team tournament that will be held in Des
Moines on Feb.
17.