

3 Metro teams seek playoff berths

Written by Jim Ecker

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It will be interesting to see how many high school football teams with 2-and-7 records make the Class 4A playoffs this year.

The Kennedy Cougars will make the 32-team field with a 2-7 mark if they defeat Waterloo West at Kingston Stadium Friday night, but they're not the only ones who could advance with a 2-7 record.

Iowa City High, Clinton and Mason City also could "earn" spots in the Class 4A tournament with 2-7 marks. That would be an improvement for Mason City, which qualified a few years ago with a 1-8 record.

We can thank - or blame - the district format for all this. The only results that count are district games. The non-district games are simply exhibitions, as far as making the playoffs, so it's a lot easier to make the playoffs now.

You can lose all of your non-district games, finish fourth in your district with a wobbly record and march into the playoffs at 2-7 (and sometimes even 1-8).

Under the old conference format, it normally took at least four victories to make the playoffs, although occasionally a team would slip through with a 3-6 mark. The schools voted for this system, so now everyone has to live with it.

Washington, Linn-Mar and Xavier have clinched playoff berths. The top-ranked Warriors are 8-0 and rolling along. The sixth-ranked Lions are 7-1, with the only loss to Washington. The Saints are 5-3, but have struggled on offense in their losses to Dowling (24-2), Western Dubuque (7-6) and Iowa City Regina (21-7) with only one touchdown on offense.

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Jefferson (4-4) will make the playoffs with an upset victory at Linn-Mar Friday. Barring that, the J-Hawks will make the field if Waterloo West beats Kennedy. But if Kennedy beats Waterloo West in a tight game, the J-Hawks could be left by the curb if they lose to Linn-Mar by a substantial margin.

Jefferson, Waterloo West and Kennedy are in District 5 and they could end up in a three-way tie for the 3rd, 4th and 5th spots in the division with 2-3 division records. The IHSAA has what it calls a "13-point tiebreaker" for deciding three-way ties, based on point differentials in district games.

The top four teams in each district make the playoffs. If you finish fifth, you go home.

Jefferson fans might want to keep an ear on the Waterloo West-Kennedy game on KGYM radio Friday night, especially if the J-Hawks are struggling against Linn-Mar. Jefferson fans might want to learn the Waterloo West fight song.

The Prairie Hawks can make the playoffs if they beat Ottumwa at home Friday night and Iowa City High loses to Muscatine by a considerable margin.

Prairie, Ottumwa and City High are in District 6 and could finish in a three-way tie for 3rd, 4th and 5th place. In that case, the 13-point tiebreaker would be used to determine the playoff teams from that district as well.

Washington and Linn-Mar have clinched No. 1 seeds for the playoffs. Xavier can clinch a No. 1 seed in Class 3A with a victory over Marion Friday night at Saints Field.

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Washington can finish the regular season with a 9-0 record with a victory at Burlington Friday night.

The first-round pairings will be announced late Friday night or early Saturday morning. The first-round games will be played Wednesday.