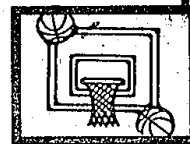


Sports

business inside



Chris McCosky, Brad Emons editors/591-2312

Thursday, December 5, 1985 O&E

(F10)

Expanded playoffs: an endangered idea

WHAT A BLAST. Is there anyone who didn't enjoy the new state high school football playoffs? Maybe supporters of Detroit Henry Ford and Sterling Heights Stevenson weren't happy, as their highly-touted teams lost in preliminary rounds.

But look who beat those heavyweights — Troy! The Collis' success and eventual trek to the state championship game resulted from a precise blend of several factors, such as team cohesion, good coaching, confidence, talent and luck.

But another ingredient should be neither overlooked nor underestimated — timing. For in any previous year, Troy's 8-1 regular-season record probably wouldn't have been good enough to qualify for the state playoffs.

Use this year's results on last year's yardstick — when only two teams from each of four Class A regions qualified for the playoffs — and you'll find Henry Ford and Stevenson, both unbeaten during the regular season, make the state tournament in Troy's region.

BUT THE PLAYOFF field was doubled to four per region this year, Troy qualified, and the rest is history.

"It was very well received," Lonnie Lowery, assistant director of the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA), said of the expanded playoffs. "We've had a lot of positive feedback from it."

Certainly there were few (if any) complaints. No unbeaten teams missed the state tournament, an injustice that occurred too frequently under the eight-teams-per-class format.

So everyone is happy, right?

Perhaps for now. But by 1987, the joy could turn to jeers if someone can't figure a playoff format acceptable to coaches, administrators, parents, players, teachers, fans — in short, something to please everyone.

Sound impossible? It might be.

The problem is the length of the season. Prior to this year, there were nine regular-season and three playoff games. The MHSAA, urged by the Michigan High School Football Coaches Association (MHSFCA) and supported by school administrators, decided to expand the playoffs another round for 1985.

THEIR REASON was timing. Because of a late Thanksgiving, the traditional finish for the prep season, there was an extra weekend. Therefore, an extra round could be added this year — and next — without juggling the schedule.

Which was grand. Sixteen teams per class instead of eight. Fewer injustices, a truer test of a championship team's merits.

Unfortunately, inserting the additional playoff game for these two years only delayed the inevitable. A decision must be made regarding the future of the state prep football playoffs — sooner or later.

The MHSAA's Representative Council will attempt to make one sooner when it conducts its biannual meeting next week. According to Lowery, "None of the plans that have been submitted (to the council) have been ruled out totally."

What the MHSAA must do is figure out a way to squeeze four playoff games into three post-season weeks, or to somehow alter the regular season. Each plan submitted to the council contains a degree of merit, but each possesses enough drawbacks to thwart widespread acceptance.

THE MHSFCA proposed a plan to allow teams to substitute playoff foes for their ninth-game opponents. Example: Team A is scheduled to play team B in their final regular-season game. But team A qualifies for the playoffs and is supposed to play team C. On the ninth week, A goes against C in the playoff while B tackles C's original final-game opponent, team D.

Sound reasonable? But there are problems. Lowery indicated. Some conferences, like the Detroit Catholic League and the Detroit Public School League, have championship games on the ninth week. Other schools play heated cross-town rivalries that final date.

Another idea supported by the MHSFCA is to start the season a week early. But that would mean prior to Labor Day and the official start of school. MHSAA officials fear the loss of a week of pre-season practice could result in increased injuries and possible lawsuits.

A third suggestion calls for four playoff games to be played in three weeks. That would result in playing a game in mid-week. This idea, according to Lowery, "drew the greatest amount of criticism" the last time the council met, but according to Farmington Harrison coach John Herrington, Indiana and Wisconsin use this method so it shouldn't be ruled out.

THEN THERE'S always a chance the regular season schedule can be juggled so that meaningless league games slated for the season's first week can be pushed to the end of the schedule.

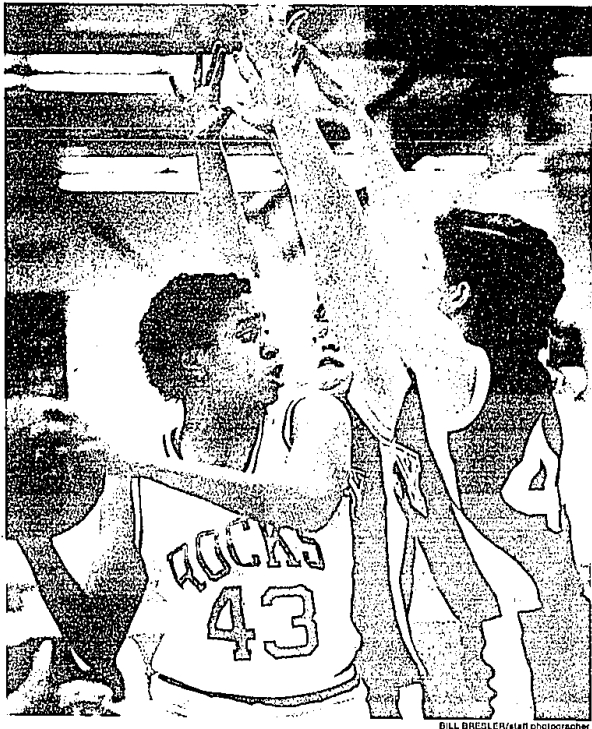
"And have the first game of the season a league game?" A dubious Herrington asked. "Not too many coaches would like that."

So what plan does the MHSFCA support?

"We're all divided," Herrington said. "Every meeting I've been to, no one's been able to agree on a plan."

The MHSFCA was attempting to rectify that at its meeting yesterday. The coaches better come up with something sound enough to garner majority support, or by 1987 the prep playoffs could be back where they were prior to this year.

Half of many teams, half as much fun. And no chance for teams like Troy.



The Mercy press, as evidenced above by Yvette Maison and Margaret DeMatteis, bothered and befuddled Dena Head (No. 43) and the rest of the Salem team Tuesday in the opening round of the Class A regional tournament.

Mercy unveils a secret weapon, crumbles Rocks

By Chris McCosky staff writer

Getting information out of the Farmington Hills Mercy basketball camp the past three weeks has been as easy as getting news out of the Kremlin.

Mercy practiced in secrecy. They even played their district tournament games in disguise using myriad offensive and defensive formations.

The secret was let out of the bag Tuesday night.

Mercy, deploying a brand new offense and a brand new pressing defense, exploded on host Plymouth Salem, 57-46, in the first round of the Class A regional tournament.

"We worked three grim weeks for this game," an elated Mercy coach Larry Baker said. "We wanted to keep the whole thing under wraps."

"I've never been prouder of this group. We came in here with the disadvantage of being without Terri Ford (starting forward out with an injured ankle), of playing at Plymouth Salem and having lost to them earlier this season. But our kids came out with their heads screwed on tight."

And fire in their eyes.

girls basketball

IT DIDN'T help Head's game that she picked up three quick fouls in the first half, either. Still, the sophomore managed 17 points.

"The problem was, we didn't get Dena the ball often enough where she is in a position to score," Thomann said. "When she did get into a spot where she could take advantage of Fryatt, we weren't getting her the ball."

Jessica Handley added nine points and Kristin Hosteny, who fouled out in the final quarter, added eight for Salem.

"This was our first big win of the year," Baker said. "We've been looking for this all year — to beat a team that had every reason to beat us."

For Salem, it was the end of a very good season. The Western Lakes champions finish with a 19-4 record.

"You know, we'd like to be able to play them one more time," Thomann said. "Kind of a two-out-of-three series. I think we'd play them better the next time around, but the state tournament doesn't work that way."

For Mercy, it's 17-5 and a chance to win its fifth consecutive regional championship. The Marlins will take on undefeated Waterford Kettering (22-0) at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at Salem.

Marlins-Kettering in finale

There will be a whole lot of pressing and impressing going on at Plymouth Salem Thursday night.

Waterford Kettering, a waterbug-like team that swarms the entire court on defense for four quarters, will put its undefeated record on the line against Farmington Hills Mercy, another team famed for its pressing defense, in the Class A regional finale beginning at 7:30 p.m.

The winner will advance to the quarterfinal round at Waterford Mott next Wednesday. The winner will most likely face the No. 1-ranked team in the state and defending state champion Flint Northwestern.

Kettering, coached by Charlie Shires, is 22-0 on the season. Mercy, 17-5, is going after its fifth consecutive regional crown under coach Larry Baker.

Captain press mauls Marian

By Chris McCosky staff writer

It's "strike three, you're out!" for the Birmingham Marian basketball team.

Undefeated Waterford Kettering threw the third strike Tuesday night in the state Class A regional tournament at Plymouth Salem, 50-40.

"It's the same old story," a despondent Marian coach Mary Lillie said. "It's the third year in a row we've been knocked out in the first round of the regionals."

Kettering (22-0) will play Farmington Hills Mercy at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in the regional finals.

Two factors helped Kettering take control of Marian Tuesday: its helterskelter full court press and Marian's foul trouble.

THE MUSTANGS had things going their way through the first 10 minutes of the game. The inside-outside combination of Ralby Phillips and Noelle Neary helped Marian build a 14-11 lead early in the second quarter.

Marian had an extreme height advantage over the Captains and it used it well early on.

Then, with 5:49 left in the first half, Phillips, a talented 6-3 sophomore, picked up her third foul. The complexion of the game changed dramatically from that point on.

"That really hurt us," Lillie said. "We had the momentum going. We were getting the ball where we wanted it and we were making our shots."

Lillie was a bit miffed at some of the officials' calls.

"The officials in our district games let everything go. It was like a football game. Fought they called everything. There's no consistency and it's very hard on the girls to adjust," she said.

MARIAN ALSO had trouble adjusting to the Captain press.

"Kettering is quicker than lightning," Lillie said. "We've never played a team with that much quickness."

All-state guard Cindy Lyons, her sister, Kristi Lyons, and Lisa Kline bodiced the Mustangs all night and forced 23 turnovers from the press.

Kettering took control of the game in the third quarter, running off a 10-4 spurt in the first five minutes.

Six third-quarter points by Wicky Gudennurr helped keep Marian in contention.

The Captains led the win with another 10 runs in the final two minutes of the game.

Julie Nickman led Kettering with 13 points. Kristi Lyons scored 12 and Kline 10.

Phillips managed 12 for Marian. Sue Thompson added eight.

"We did not have a good night," Lillie said. "But we still gave them a good game. They are a good team. You can't take anything away from them."

Marian ends the year with a 12-11 record.

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