



Chris McCosky

Playoff expansion: What's the holdup?

THE FUTURE of the high school football playoffs hangs in the balance as the Michigan High School Athletic Association's Representative Council convenes Sunday.

Before this council is a proposal to expand the football playoffs from the current 32-team format to an 128-team format.

It's about time.

The current playoff format in the state of Michigan is blatantly unfair. Every year since its inception in 1975, the current format has left many deserving football teams out of contention for a state championship.

The Michigan High School Football Coaches Association has been complaining about the 32-team format since... well, since 1975. Finally, nine years later, the MHSAA is taking the time and effort to listen to these complaints.

MORE IMPORTANTLY, Vern Norris, the MHSAA's executive director, and his crew appear ready and willing to make changes in the current format.

But, the MHSAA is a slow-moving policy maker. It took them nine years to see the obvious inequities of the current format. Let's hope it doesn't take another nine years for them to implement changes.

Already there is evidence of foot-dragging on the part of the MHSAA.

The coaches association took on the challenge of improving their playoff system in 1981. They appointed Ithaca High School coach Jim Ahern to head a research team to study the situation and produce an alternative playoff plan which the association could propose to the MHSAA.

After two years of collecting data from across the nation, Ahern presented his alternative plan: expand the playoffs to include 128 teams (32 in each class) and expand the playoffs from three to five games.

The plan, which was entitled the "Ahern Plan", also detailed how the teams would be selected and how the additional playoff dates would be scheduled.

Those elements, expressed in far more detail, were put before the MHSAA's Playoff Committee on Jan. 30. The playoff committee, according to MHSAA Assistant Director Lonnie Lowery, accepted only one part of the Ahern Plan.

"WE RECOMMENDED to the Representative Council that they expand the playoffs to 128 teams," Lowery, a member of the playoff committee, said. "We did not make a recommendation on how the 128 teams would be selected or on when the additional playoff games would be played."

So on Sunday (May 6), the Representative Council will be discussing only one issue — whether or not to expand the playoffs to 128 teams.

Lowery said that the council could do one of four things: approve the proposal, reject the proposal, postpone a decision to allow further study or ask for input from the high schools.

If the proposal is approved, then the council will decide how to select the 128 teams and when to play the additional playoff games.

The fact that the MHSAA is now considering an expanded playoff format is a major breakthrough — something for which the MHSAA should be applauded. However, it seems like a waste of time to tackle the issue piece by piece — especially since two years of research has already been logged by the coaches association.

THE AHERN PLAN is basically a solid playoff format, with one weakness. It is this weakness that may have forced the playoff committee to accept only one aspect of it.

To schedule the two additional playoff games, the Ahern Plan called for teams to play three games in eight days. The first playoff date would be scheduled the Tuesday or Wednesday after the final regular season game. The second playoff game the following Saturday.

The concern, obviously, is whether the athletes can withstand that type of physical strain and if four days are sufficient time to prepare to play in a game of that magnitude.

It is a risky proposition, to be sure.

Here is an alternative that works: Instead of the three-game-in-eight-days concept, teams could play an eight-game schedule and leave the ninth week in the schedule open. The first round of the playoffs would be played in the ninth week. For example, if this suggestion was in effect for the 1984 season, the regular season would start Aug. 31 and end Oct. 19 or Oct. 20. Then the five-week playoff schedule would begin the following week and the season would not be expanded.

TEAMS NOT making the playoffs would be able to schedule a non-league game to fill the open date. Teams would know as early as the fourth or fifth week of the season if they were in contention for the playoffs and athletic directors would have plenty of time to schedule an opponent for that ninth date.

Perhaps this talk is premature. It seems natural to discuss expanding the playoffs in one package. But, the MHSAA prefers to break it into three steps. So be it.

The first thing that must be done is for the Representative Council to approve the expansion of the playoff format to 128 teams this Sunday.

Once done, we can only hope that the MHSAA will not completely toss away the two years of work put in by the coaches association, nor completely give up on the Ahern Plan.

It is not too much to ask for the state of Michigan to have an equitable high school football playoff format ready to go by 1984. The framework is already in place. The ball is now in the bureaucratic court of the MHSAA.

Hopefully, they won't fumble.

Mercy kickers find groove

Marlins finish strong in S'craft tournament

The Farmington Hills Our Lady of Mercy soccer team had the misfortune of drawing Livonia Churchill in the first round of the Schoolcraft Community College Invitational tournament last Friday.

Churchill, ranked No. 2 in the state by the coaches poll and No. 2 in Oberlin, eventually won the 16-team tournament by defeating Troy Athens 1-0 on Dorene Dudek's goal off a penalty kick with two minutes left in the championship match Saturday.

To get to that point, Churchill had to survive a tough first-round match against upstart Mercy.

The Chargers held on to defeat Mercy 2-0.

The Marlins, a first-year team, applied strong pressure on the Chargers but missed on several good scoring chances in the first half. Churchill scored one time in the first half and another in the second to secure the victory.

THE OPENING round loss meant that the very best Mercy could place was eighth — and that's exactly where they finished. The Marlins rallied to win their final three matches in the tourney's consolation bracket.

The first win made history. The first soccer victory in the school's history came at the expense of a good Garden City team, 3-1. Amy DeMatia, Annette Ruggiero and Laura Bouchard scored the Mercy goals.

"We got outstanding play all day from our fullbacks," said Mercy coach Gene Fogel. He was talking specifically about Jenny Horst, Banu Rangarajan, and Elaine Montemurro.

Fogel also praised the efforts of goalie Kathy Rush who allowed just three goals in the four tournament matches.

Mercy, behind two goals by Ruggiero, beat Saginaw Eisenhower 4-0 in the third game. DeMatia and Mary Beth Larabell also scored for the Marlins.

The Marlins closed out its tournament with a thrilling 1-0, four overtime win against Brighton. Amy Stock kicked home the game-winner.

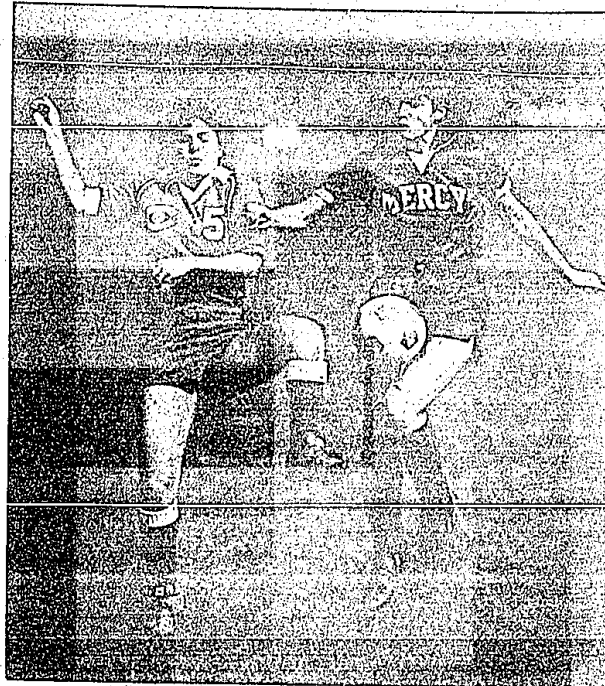
Strange thing: Livonia Ladywood, with a 1-3 record, finished ahead of Mercy in the overall tournament standings. Why? Because Ladywood won its first-round match.

THE MARLINS gained another milestone on Monday. They won their first Catholic League match, defeating Harper Woods Regina 3-1.

Ruggiero, who's been on a goal-scoring tear, tallied twice more to pace the Marlins. Mary Duval added Mercy's third score.

Goalie Betty Eads made some spectacular saves to squelch Regina's second-half rally. Mercy led 3-1 after the first half, but Regina scored quickly in the second half and kept the pressure on. But, they couldn't get the equalizer past Eads.

The Marlins are now 4-2 overall this season, 1-1 in Catholic League play. The Marlins take on rival Livonia Ladywood today at Schoolcraft College.



Annette Ruggiero knees the ball past an Eisenhower defender Saturday in Mercy's 4-0 win. Ruggiero had two goals in the

match, three in the four games Mercy played at the Schoolcraft Invitational.

Rocks and Falcons fight wind in 0-0 tie

Farmington soccer coach Ed Bartram isn't quite sure how to accept it, but his team battled formerly No. 6-ranked Plymouth Salem to a 0-0 tie in a wind-swept affair Monday.

"The wind was such a big factor, I really don't know what to say," said the coach.

The hurricane-force winds that caused much destruction and even death throughout the state Monday made a travesty out of the soccer game.

"We played the game. That's about all you can say," Bartram added.

Neither team could sustain much of an attack though Salem held a 34-12 edge in shots. The ball was often blown out of bounds. As Bartram said, it was mostly a game of side kicks.

PAM FAULKNER played a strong game in the nets for Farmington, making several game-saving stops. Sweeper Sue Bartram gave Faulkner a big help with a stalwart defensive effort. Leading the charge in the Falcon attacking zone was Jennifer Cunningham.

"I thought Salem pretty much dominated the first half, but we played them pretty even in the second half. I'm surprised by the shots on goal margin. I thought they'd be closer than that," Bartram said.

The Falcons are 2-3-1 overall this season, 0-3-1 in the Western Lakes. Salem is 5-2-1, 3-0-1 in the league.



Harrison's Mike Rosensau will be one of many talented individual track and field performers competing in the Observer-News relay Saturday at Livonia Churchill. Bishop Gorge is the team everyone will be gunning for. See only on page 20.

Invest in CATS and double your money in 7 years, triple it in 10 years. Plus AAA quality.

CATS (Certificates of Accrual on Treasury Securities) multiply your money at an assured rate. You know today what your investment will be worth at the time of maturity.

CATS represent ownership of interest and principal payments of United States Treasury notes or bonds, which are direct AAA obligations of the United States of America. Since there is no need to reinvest interest payments, CATS yield-to-maturity is guaranteed.

WHAT CATS CAN DO FOR YOU		
Amount of Investment	Amount paid at Maturity	Yield to Maturity
\$4725	1990-\$10,000	11.5%
\$3000	1994-\$10,000	11.7%
\$1020	2004-\$10,000	11.4%

Use Your IRA to Invest in CATS. CATS are particularly suitable for IRAs, Keoghs, Pension Plans and other tax-deferred investments.

CATS are available in \$1,000 maturity units and usually in maturities of from one to twenty years. The prices and yields shown are subject to change.

For more information on CATS, contact a Kidder, Peabody representative today.

*Trademark of Salomon Brothers Inc. *Trademark of Kidder, Peabody & Co., Incorporated

Kidder, Peabody & Co., Incorporated
 Members New York and New York Stock Exchange

3290 West Big Beaver Road
 Troy, MI 48064
 Tel: (313) 849-5700
 Over 70 additional offices worldwide

Please provide me with information on CATS.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 Home phone _____
 Bus phone _____

SLC182 Member SIPC