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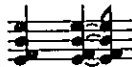


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1985 prep season brings grid changes

By C.J. Risak
staff writer

Arbitration, alteration and computation proved a winning combination for the Michigan High School Football Coaches Association in its efforts to make changes in the state playoff system.

And even though victory was achieved, the triumph did not come easily. The Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) relented, adding eight teams in each class (A, B, C and D), two per region, and an extra game to the prep season.

The MHSAA representative council vote favoring expansion was by a narrow 10-9 margin at its May meeting. An amendment attached to the proposal, to evaluate the expanded playoffs after the season and decide whether to keep it or go back to the eight-team-per-class formula used since 1975, does not instill optimism for the future.

STILL, THE COACHES' association was pleased to push this much through. It's been an uphill battle from the start, and future conflicts are inevitable before the war is decided.

Last year, the coaches proposed expanding the playoffs to 32 teams per class, quadrupling the current number. That would have necessitated adding two games to the schedule for teams reaching the finals.

Timing was the MHSAA's greatest objection to the coaches' plan. One or two weeks would have to be added to the schedule (depending on which option was selected), pushing football into basketball season.

The MHSAA rejected the proposal, forcing the coaches to regroup and arbitrate a new plan. They altered their proposal by slashing the number of playoff participants in half and resubmitted it this year.

TWO FACTORS helped the coaches get approval: a survey that showed 68.8 percent of the 713 MHSAA-member schools favored expansion; and a quick in this year's football season that allows for an extra weekend. The extra playoff game can be added without changing the present season.

The qualifying teams will still be chosen by computer points (awarded for victories and difficulty of schedule), with the state divided into four regions in each class.

The reason the coaches lobbied for expansion was, simply, to eliminate injustices within the present system. Teams with outstanding records — including some that have gone undefeated — have been sidelined during the playoffs by a lack of computer points.

More teams, the coaches argued, would be a step toward eliminating the problem.

PLAYOFF EXPANSION was not the coaches only victory at the MHSAA's meeting. A proposal by Jerry Cvengros of Escanaba to provide "the best possible playing surface for semifinal games by using artificial surfaces where possible, in addition to the best available natural fields," was adopted.

The decision comes a year late for Farmington Harrison, a fleet-footed team that had its speed negated by the quagmire of Pontiac's Wisner Stadium during last year's Class A semifinal.

The MHSAA council adopted the proposal even though it meant competing schools may have to travel greater distances to reach the semifinal site.

Both changes in the playoff format should prove beneficial. But the coaches' association still must develop a formula for the 1986 season.

And once developed, the association must successfully lobby for its approval by the MHSAA's council. That task is never easy.



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Cover: Birmingham Seaholm running back Rob Mashigan gets sandwiched by two Farmington Harrison players in the Class A State Quarterfinals last season (staff photo by Gary Caskey).