

A new twist to prep game: video playoffs

THIS TIME I'VE GOT IT.

I know, I know, I've said it before. I've had more money-making schemes than the stock market's had 100-point fluctuations in a single day.

But this time, I really think I'm on to something. This idea incorporates everything people love: television, football, a touch of gambling, audience participation, and the excitement of playoffs.

Here's the best part of my plan: Everyone goes to the state tournament.

Sounds crazy, I know. But it could work. Examine this year's prep playoff fiasco. So they expanded, taking 16 teams per class. There are still the Westland John Glenns, Troys, Redford Catholic Centrals and North Farmington out there, teams that can only make it to post-season play through a series of highly unlikely events — something as likely as the Ayatollah, the pope and Jim Bakker all agreeing to do lunch.

Let's expand further. How, you ask, without taking the season into next spring?

Easy, I answer. Enter the computer age. Here's the gimmick. First, each and every

high school football game is televised on cable. A computer program is devised to evaluate each and every play, both offensively and defensively. Each team is awarded or penalized points for performance, on every play.

Outcome, class level of opponent (A, B, C or D) and opponent's ability are all factored into the final totals, which are kept for every team for the entire season. At the end of the regular season, every team is seeded according to his final point total.

SEE THE BEAUTY of it? Instead of being evaluated on just who you play and what the outcome is, every play is taken into consideration. It's fairer, and certainly more accurate. And it also encourages Rob Hagersteyn's football ("Keep those points piling up, guys").

But more — it allows for expansion, and without ever exposing a team to overwork. Here's how: With each team's entire season stored in a computer, a coach and his staff can conduct a game against the opponent, limited to the plays he used during the



C.J. Risak

season. A coach calls his offensive play; his opponent counters with a defense. The computer calculates how many yards are gained or lost, taking into consideration each team's record and success rate on that particular play.

The first three rounds of the playoffs could be conducted like this — all in the first week. That would narrow it down to the final 16, which — like the present playoff system — could be done live and in person, with real teams.

Sound good so far?

I know what you're thinking. Flaws, too many flaws. This sounds like an expensive proposition, filming every high school foot-

ball game.

THAT'S WHERE audience participation comes in. Here's how: A guy's at home, watching his favorite team — say Redford Union — play Rochester Adams. Now, in any football game, there's a lot of dead time between plays, isn't there?

I say capitalize on it! TV watchers use their remote channel-changers to enter what the next play will be, run or pass, and how many yards will be gained or lost. Say 260 people are playing the TV game. Points are awarded to whoever's guess is best. By game's end, the person with the most points wins the jackpot.

Wins what, you ask? That depends on how many people were playing. Say it costs five bucks to play. Make it like a 50-50 drawing (which, by the way, are legal at even a high school game I've ever been to) — 50 percent is prize money, 50 percent goes for expenses.

Now, there's no reason to limit the players. If a guy plays all nine weeks of the regular season, his point totals give him a shot at a grand prize. That would encourage partici-

pation each and every week.

WHAT DO YOU think so far? Sure, there are details to work out, but it is more than feasible. More than reasonable. And certainly more than profitable.

Imagine the television revenues from the sale of the first three rounds of the playoffs. A coach calls a play, another calls a defense, a film of the play is run, the computer does its thing, and a number flashes: gain of 22, first down. And thousands of people are busy playing at home!

I like it. Everything America stands for is included — the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat, the risk of investment, and — most importantly — the fairness that all teams, the best and the bums, have a chance at a state championship.

Computing high school football. It'll work. Actually, it's been done. Coaches around the state are busy with their calculators, figuring what has to happen this week-end for their teams to make the playoffs.

All I want to do, basically, is make that figuring more exciting, more expensive — and more profitable.

Post-season berths hinge on final games

By Brad Emmons and Dan O'Meara staff writers

WHAT'S THE SCOOP on the state football playoffs?

By Sunday night everything should be cleared up, but between now and then there will be a few anxious coaches and teams, wondering whether they'll qualify for one of the state's coveted 64 post-season berths.

Class A Region IV is the most intriguing, as two area teams are hanging on the edge.

The playoff system, a computer ranking based on the number of victories and opponents' victories, currently finds Westland John Glenn (7-1) and Redford Catholic Central (7-1) both looking from the outside in Region IV.

• Both teams first must get past their respective opponents in the season finale to have any kind of a shot.

Glenn must defeat rival Wayne Memorial (6-7) and CC must top Southgate Aquinas (6-2) for the Catholic League's A-B Division championship. No easy task for either team.

• Sterling Heights (8-0) and Dearborn Fordson (8-0) are "locks" on two of the four spots. Sterling Heights, tops at 113,000 on the computer, could lose at 26 Mount Clemens and still get in. Fordson, 110,000, could lose at Melvindale (6-3) and still make it. Both teams, however, should finish the year undefeated.

• The teams with an inside track for the other two spots are one-beat Detroit Chasdeley (95.5) and Utica Eisenhower (93.875). Chasdeley will be a virtual lock if it defeats 7-1 Detroit Cass Tech in the Public School League championship, but that is no guarantee. And Eisenhower should get the other spot if it

beats 7-1 Sterling Heights Stevenson (another Region IV team), which is no cinch.

• Catholic Central, fourth this week on the computer at 94.75, and Glenn sixth at 92.625, will both be rooting for Cass Tech and Sterling Heights Stevenson to win this week, to have a chance at one of the two final spots. Both CC and Glenn have a slight edge over two other once-beaten teams, Port Huron Northern (91.750) and Berkley (93.750). Port Huron Northern winds up the season at Warren Cousino (5-3) and Berkley travels to Oak Park (2-6).

• It appears that three other once-beaten teams — Troy (91.750), Dearborn Edsel Ford (90.208) and Sterling Heights Stevenson (88.0) — are real longshots.

What does this all mean? Both CC and Glenn have to help themselves and then get some help. Glenn has a slight edge over CC, but it will all depend on bonus points and whether Glenn's or CC's opponents do better this weekend.

AND WHERE DOES once-beaten North Farmington fit into the picture in Class A Region III? To earn a shot, the Raiders must first defeat Clarkston (6-2) Saturday at home. That's a no-lock-inch.

The odds are stacked against the Raiders, who are behind Warren Lincoln (8-0), which wraps up the season against Warren Fitzgerald (8-0); Ferndale (7-1), which finishes against Hazel Park (3-5); Birmingham Brother Rice (7-1), which plays Class C Orchard Lake St. Mary's (7-1); Cass Tech, which takes on Chadsey (see above); and Grosse Pointe South (7-1), which must lose to rival Grosse Pointe North (6-2). North must also get help from Royal Oak Kimball (3-5), which plays another Region III challenger, Royal Oak Dondoro (7-1).

The area's other team eyeing post-season play, Farmington Harrison

(7-1), is a "lock" for one of the four spots in Class B Region IV. The Hawks could lose Saturday in the season finale to West Bloomfield (4-4) and still make the playoffs.

Other teams battling for the three spots in Class B Region IV include unbeaten Allen Park, which plays at Class C Detroit Lutheran West (4-4); Monroe Catholic Central (8-0), which faces Ypsilanti Lincoln (6-2); Dearborn Divine Child (6-2), which meets Redford Bishop Borgess (4-4) for the second time this year (DC won the first meeting by a point); and Aquinas, which meets CC (see above).

Harrison is a lock because it has defeated seven of eight Class A opponents. It's only defeat was to Glenn.

LAST WEEK, both prognosticators had a rough week. O'Meara, 8-6 last week, is now 88-29 on the year. Emmons, 9-5 last week, is 92-32. Here are the season's final predictions.

FRIDAY GAMES

(all games at 7:30 p.m.)

Liv. Spartans (6-2) at Liv. Churchill (4-4): The Spartans may be kicking themselves for losing to Franklin (14-13) earlier in the year, or they might have been in the thick of things in Class A Region IV. Churchill is a young team hoping to finish the year on a winning note. Picks — Stevenson wins its sixth straight.

Westland Glenn (7-1) at Wayne Memorial (6-2): The last time Wayne defeated Glenn was when Rick Rogers was carrying the pack. This is a grudge match that will match passing quarterbacks Cimi Strub of Glenn and Mike Heard of Wayne. Look for an aerial show. Picks — Go with Glenn again.

Ply. Canton (5-3) vs. Ply. Salem (5-3) at CEP: Canton has never beaten Salem since the schools began meeting. An upset in the making? Picks — Emmons says Canton plays out of its skull. O'Meara says the Rocks are a solid choice.

Farmington (1-7) at Redford Union (2-6): In a game like this, turnovers could be the determining factor. RU's offense is slightly better, but Farmington's defense

could provide an upset. Picks — Emmons says Farmington comes to play. RU gets the nod from O'Meara.

SATURDAY GAMES

(all at 1 p.m. unless noted)

Garden City (0-8) at Liv. Franklin (4-4): The Cougars are trying to avoid a dubious record, while the Patriots hope to make it a winning season. GC handled the Pats easily last year. Picks — GC pulls the upset, according to Emmons. Franklin finishes above .500 by O'Meara's estimation.

Clarencville (6-2) at Thurston (1-7): A mismatch? Not really, because Clarencville has played a weaker schedule. Thurston's defense, a good one, is constantly on the field. The offense has been pathetic at times. Picks — Emmons says Thurston stumps the so-called experts. O'Meara picks Clarencville.

W. Bloomfield (4-4) at Farm. Harrison (7-1): West Bloomfield is coming off a win and Harrison is coming off a loss, but don't be surprised if things fall in reverse this week. Picks — The Hawks tune up

for the playoffs.

Clarkston (6-2) at N. Farmington (7-1): An interesting matchup because the Raiders have been slugging the past few weeks. Clarkston has lost to a pair of tough teams in state playoff contenders Midland Dow and South Lyon. Picks — Clarkston wins a road test, predicts Emmons. North stands its ground at home, says O'Meara.

Bishop Borgess (4-4) vs. Divine Child (6-2): The two teams met earlier in the season with DC escaping with a one-point win. Borgess's losses have been to CC, Rice, Notre Dame (one point) and DC (one point). DC has been beaten by Harper Woods Bishop Gallagher and A.A. Division champ Southgate Aquinas. Picks — The con please. It's heads. Borgess keeps DC out of the playoffs.

Grosse Pointe Lippett (1-7) at Lutheran Westland (2-6): Lutheran Westland has been overwhelmed at times in its first varsity season, but Lippett is nothing to brag about. Picks — Lippett wins.

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