

## Court ruling creates pool problem

**BY KURT KUBAN**  
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The decision has left North Farmington's Pat Duthie, who coaches both the boys and girls swim teams, scratching his head. With only one pool, Duthie isn't sure how both teams can practice during the same season.

"I think the decision is going to create a number potential problems. Pool usage for an-

thing. What are we going to do about practice times, if both seasons are taking place at the same time?" he said.

"I think it is really going to hurt many of the community's club teams, because it will very difficult for them to get any pool time. Ultimately that will hurt us at this level as well, because those clubs are our only feeder programs, because we don't have swimming at the middle school

level in this district. So this is going to put us at a disadvantage."

If the change does take place, Duthie isn't even sure if he will be able to continue coaching both boys and girls with them competing at the same time.

In more than 20 years of coaching, Duthie said he has never witnessed "girls being discriminated against" in the sport of swimming, nor any other sport.

for that matter. He said girls have the same opportunities that boys do to compete and obtain college scholarships. In fact, his daughter Christio, who he coached at North until 1990, earned an athletic scholarship to Ferris State University.

Ultimately, Duthie said he would be happier if decisions pertaining to high school athletics were made by people involved with high school athletics.

"This ruling is just another example of people who have no practical experience of what we're doing on a day-to-day basis making decisions that are going to affect us negatively," he said.

"Hopefully an appeals court will overturn this, because there doesn't seem to be a positive rationale to it. I need someone to point out the positives. At this point, I just see more negatives coming out of this."

# Risak

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problem. Not that it matters to any of those people who filed the lawsuit.

In actuality, the sports that would be affected most are swimming, soccer, tennis and golf. The reason is a lack of facilities.

Chuck Olson, the longtime coach of Plymouth Salem's boys and girls swim teams, figures 50 percent of those who join his teams would have to be cut, simply because there wouldn't be enough room in the pool for both teams to practice.

So stagger the practice schedules, right? One earlier, one later?

Wrong. Club teams, like the Plymouth-Canton Cruisers, work out at Salem's pool too. Send them packing and you undermine the foundation of the district's swim program, which has reached state championship quality.

Tennis would feel the same crunch. Each school only has so many courts to practice on. Put boys and girls teams working out at the same time of year and you create a logjam, which could only be resolved one way: cutting a lot of kids who, under the current format, would be playing.

As Olson said, "I thought high school athletics was about participation. I don't think this is in the best interest of the high school athlete."

Golf would face a similar challenge. Local courses can accommodate a few high school teams in the fall and spring seasons but putting both at the same time of year could cause location problems. Golf courses are private enterprises; their objective is to make money. Flooding their facility with high school teams and leaving other golfers waiting is not in their best (business) interest.

Then there's soccer. What mess that would be.

**Example:** Anyone familiar with soccer and Livonia knows how much one means to the other. Imagine Livonia Franklin's final soccer match of the season, on a quagmire of field that has accommodated four soccer teams (two boys and two girls) and three football teams in a 10-week span.

And when and where would those seven teams practice? *Das I need the car tonight. Football practice is at 10 and we need the headlights.*

But this is of no consequence to the CFE. Fair is fair. Why not change the boys seasons? Let them play soccer in the spring, they say.

Know what? I wouldn't even care if they did switch those songs.

But the parents who back the CFE should. They should be careful. They should ask themselves what would serve the daughter's interests best, playing at the very end of her junior year when college soccer coaches have no other recruiting distractions, or three months later when college coaches are trying to coach their team while recruiting in every other state in the country.

Mind you, I haven't even touched on the coaches who would lose jobs, like those who coach boys and girls teams of the same sport. And the lack of adequate officiating.

Hey, other states manage, too," CFE insists. It's the right way. Not necessarily better, but right. Participation be damned — this is the age of the elite athlete.

Anyway, it's only just begun. Even if the MHSAA's appeal is denied, it's easy to envision lawsuit filed a year later by disgruntled father whose all-star daughter lost out because she didn't get the media coverage she would have received if she played in the fall.

Or perhaps they'll be another committee formed, the Parents for Grieving Children, who will file suits on behalf of those kids denied a chance to play high school sports due to a lack of adequate facilities.

Oh, it's a mess all right. Whenever self-interest groups use judicial system to push their views to the forefront, with regard for anyone else, no matter how many are hurt, the outcome won't be pretty.

It's the whining of the few on the needs of the many.

(Risak is the Plymouth-Canton sports editor for the Observer and can be reached at (734) 521-08 or by e-mail [clrisak@aol.com](mailto:clrisak@aol.com).)

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