

# Proposed grid split spiteful plan by coaches

There is something about a pack mentality that can bring out the worst in a group.

High school football coaches are no exception. Individually, many of them are among the brightest, most articulate, most forward-thinking people I've ever met.

As a group, they don't always think that way.

Specifically, I refer to a proposal by some members of the Michigan High School Football Coaches Association that would basically separate the public and private schools into their own tournaments.

They don't want this for every sport, mind you. Just football, conveniently ignoring (once again) the potential implications it may have on other sports.

Wow. It's a short-sighted, spiteful, petty plan designed by a few coaches who have come up against private schools - generally Catholic, but not always - and lost. Since they can't beat them on the field, they'd ban them from the tournament. And no, it's not specifically designed to get rid of Redford Catholic Central, but it would. It's designed to keep the playoffs safe from Muskegon Catholic Central, And Manistee Catholic Central, And St. Agatha, And Lutheran Westland, And Warren Zoe Christian.

And any other school where parents have to pay tuition to send their sons in search of a place they feel is better suited for them.

(Note: This column will not get into the 'do private schools recruit or don't they' argument. For brevity's sake, yes, a few do, but not necessarily in football. The majority of them don't. If they did, every state final in every sport would feature two

private schools. End of discussion.) The public school coaches are sick and tired of what they feel is an disproportionate number of private state titles in recent years - 13 of the 32 titles since the playoffs expanded in 1999. If they're looking for blame, they'd better take a long look in the mirror.

The football coaches allowed this to happen with overexpansion.

And instead of paring down the number of teams in the playoffs to solve the problem they created, several of the 610 public coaches want to exclude the 57 schools they feel are the root of their inability to win state titles.

At this point, a history lesson is in order.

When the Michigan High School Athletic Association ended years of mythical state titles and created the first true championship in 1975, 16 teams made the playoffs - four teams in four classes, all making the playoffs on the strength of a point formula. That expanded to 32 teams in 1977 and doubled to 64 teams in 1985.

After the 1989 playoffs, private schools had won 23 of 60 state championships in 15 years.

The football coaches successfully lobbied once again to expand the playoffs, beginning in 1990, to divide classes A, B, C and D, so 128 teams would compete for state titles in eight classes, four regions, four teams in each region.

Under this format, private schools didn't flourish - winning just 18 of 72 titles in the nine years, a 25 percent clip, well below the 38 percent in the first 15 years.

But coaches wanted more - specifically, 512 teams in the playoffs - a full nine-game schedule plus six postseason contests.

The MHSAA wouldn't expand to 512, but expanded to 256 teams allowing every team - public and private - with six wins to get in automatically. Three years later, it still isn't good enough.

The public coaches want to lump all of the private schools into their own tournament at the conclusion of the regular season. The 18 largest schools would be in newly formed Division 9, the next 19 in Division 10 and the last 20 in Division 11.

Sixteen schools in each private division would make the playoffs, regardless of record, and the tournament would be seeded like the NCAA basketball tournament. Private schools would have a four-game playoff run, ending the week before Thanksgiving, while the public schools would continue to have five.

The public-school dissenters graciously offer that it would allow more teams in the playoffs.

Allow me to graciously offer this: What a bunch of garbage.

It unfairly penalizes private schools for the success of a few and the finger-pointing excuse-making of many.

This doesn't exclude public schools that have open enrollment within the district, such as - oh, Farmington Harrison, which has won 12 state titles in 28 seasons - or districts of choice, which draw students from outside it.

As for the private-school "playoffs," it would make a mockery of the regular season. Of the 48 schools, 20 of them would have been from the Detroit Catholic League, which has its own championship.

Based on last season's final playoff point tally, it would allow first-round matchups such as 1,068 all-male Redford CC (8-1 in the regular season) against 3-6, 559-od Lansing CC. Or a game between backyard rivals Orchard Lake St. Mary and Grand Rapids South Christian. Or 8-1 Traverse City St. Francis and 1-8 Rochester Lutheran Northwest.

In February, a survey was sent to the principals, athletic directors and superintendents of football-playing schools. The results aren't out, but if they were smart, they'd look at the big picture, see how it affects the future of all sports in the

state and said no separation, no way.

The plan's fate is inevitably in the hands of the MHSAA, which will probably reject it because of the ripple effect it would have on the 23 other sports such as basketball, soccer, or cross country, which aren't petty enough to demand separate tournaments.

But it should be rejected because this group of petulant football coaches need to realize that their sport does not wag the dog.

Their whining has diluted the pool of playoff teams. The solution for overexpansion is more expansion. It's like left-handed pitching in pro baseball or quality goaltending in the NHL. There are so many teams playing that the talent pool isn't as strong.

Same thing in football.

One coach told CCS Tom Mach that his team will always make the playoffs because they'll always have at least 6-3 record. There was a time that a 6-3 record didn't make the playoffs, so the pool was stronger. The coaches wanted more teams in, now they whine that they don't win enough titles.

Sorry, fellas. You can't have it both ways.

Instead of exclusion, the coaches need to find ways to build their programs up. To realize that maybe if their school sends seven players to Division I colleges and the private school that beat them sends two kids to Division III, maybe it isn't the players in the program or the playoff system that needs fine tuning.

If they can't beat the best - be it public, private, open enrollment or school of choice - then they should find ways to improve instead of a short-sighted plan that will have long-term harm for all sports in the state.

How's that for a solution?

Paul Beaudry is the Redford Garden City sports editor for the Observer and can be reached at (734) 953-2106 or by e-mail at pbeaudry@homecom.net.

## THE WEEK AHEAD

<b>BASEBALL</b> <b>Monday, April 28</b> Lake Orion at Harrison, 4 p.m. Farmington at Waterford, 4 p.m. N Farmington at Berkley, 4 p.m. Luth. N West at Clarencville, 4:30 p.m. <b>Wednesday, April 30</b> Harrison at Rochester, 4:30 p.m. Berkley at Farmington, 4:30 p.m. A.A. Pioneer at Redford CC, 4 p.m. Hamtramck at Clarencville, 4:30 p.m. <b>Thursday, May 1</b> Stevenson at Redford CC, 4 p.m. Luth. Westland at Clarencville, 4:30 p.m. <b>Friday, May 2</b> Kimball at Harrison, 4:30 p.m. Groves at Farmington, 4 p.m. Mott at N Farmington, 4 p.m. <b>Saturday, May 3</b> Farmington Tournament, 9 a.m. Redford CC at U.D. Jesuit, 1 p.m.	<b>SOFTBALL</b> <b>Monday, April 28</b> W. Bloom. at N Farmington, 3:30 p.m. R.D. Kimball at Harrison, 4:30 p.m. Rochester at Farmington, 4:30 p.m. Luth. N West at Clarencville, 4:30 p.m. <b>Tuesday, April 29</b> Liv. Ladywood at F.H. Mercy, 4 p.m. <b>Wednesday, April 30</b> N Farmington at Troy, 4:30 p.m. Harrison at Roch. Adams, 4 p.m. Waterford at Farmington, 4 p.m. Hamtramck at Clarencville, 4:30 p.m. <b>Thursday, May 1</b> F.H. Mercy at Birm. Marian, 4 p.m. Luth. Westland at Clarencville, 4:30 p.m. <b>Friday, May 2</b> Country Day at Farmington, 4 p.m. <b>Saturday, May 3</b> North Farmington, F.H. Mercy at Brandon Tournament, TBA. <b>Sunday, May 4</b> North Farmington, F.H. Mercy at Brandon Tournament, TBA. <b>GIRLS SOCCER</b> <b>Tuesday, April 29</b> Kettering at N Farmington, 7 p.m. Harrison at Clawson, 7 p.m. Mercy at Birm. Marian, 5:30 p.m. <b>Thursday, May 1</b> Farmington at Avondale, 7:30 p.m. N Farmington at Mott, 7 p.m. Kettering at Harrison, 7 p.m. Bishop Foley at Mercy, 5:30 p.m. <b>Friday, May 2</b> N Farmington at Farmington, 7 p.m. Millard at Harrison, 12:30 p.m. <b>BOYS TRACK &amp; FIELD</b> <b>Monday, April 28</b> Redford CC at Brin. Divine Child, 4 p.m. <b>Tuesday, April 29</b> Harrison, Troy at P. Northern, 4:30 p.m.	<b>North, Southfield at Avondale, 4:30 p.m.</b> Farmington, Lathrup at Kettering, 4:30 p.m. <b>Thursday, May 1</b> Clarencville at Luth. Westland, 4:30 p.m. <b>Saturday, May 3</b> Observer Relays at Farmington, 3:30 p.m. <b>GIRLS TRACK &amp; FIELD</b> <b>Tuesday, April 29</b> Harrison, Troy at P. Northern, 4:30 p.m. North, Southfield at Avondale, 4:30 p.m. Farmington, Lathrup at Kettering, 4:30 p.m. Dearborn Divine Child at F.H. Mercy, 4 p.m. <b>Thursday, May 1</b> Clarencville at Luth. Westland, 4:30 p.m. <b>Saturday, May 3</b> Harrison at Algonac Invite, TBA. N Farmington, Farmington, Mercy at Livonia Stevenson Invite, 10 a.m. <b>BOYS TENNIS</b> <b>Monday, April 28</b> Redford CC at Warren Delta State, 3:30 p.m. <b>Tuesday, April 29</b> Andover at N Farmington, 4 p.m. A.A. Huron vs. Redford CC (Straits), 4 p.m. <b>Thursday, May 1</b> N Farmington at Roch. Adams, 4 p.m. Stoney Creek at Farmington, 4 p.m. Waterford Mott at Harrison, 4 p.m. <b>Friday, May 2</b> Cranbrook at N Farmington, 4 p.m. Millard at Farmington, 4 p.m. Redford CC at P.N. Northern, 4 p.m. <b>Saturday, May 3</b> N Farmington, Harrison at Novi Invitational, 8 a.m. <b>BOYS LACROSSE</b> <b>Tuesday, April 29</b> Troy at Redford CC, 5:30 p.m. <b>Wednesday, April 30</b> Farmington at C.P. North, 7 p.m. <b>Thursday, May 1</b> Forest Hills at Redford CC, 5 p.m. <b>Saturday, May 3</b> Farmington at H.W. Notre Dame, noon. Novi at Redford CC, 1 p.m. <b>GIRLS LACROSSE</b> <b>Wednesday, April 30</b> Farmington at Bloomfield, 5 p.m. <b>Friday, May 2</b> Farmington at Lansing Waverly, 5 p.m. <b>GIRLS GOLF</b> <b>Monday, April 28</b> Farmington at Rochester, 3:30 p.m. Ladywood vs. Mercy (Glen Oaks), 3 p.m. <b>Wednesday, April 30</b> Athens, Adams at Farmington, 3 p.m. <b>Friday, May 2</b> Farmington at South Lyon Invite, 11 a.m.
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## BASEBALL

FROM PAGE C1

Kisels started and took the loss, working into the fourth inning. Mitchell pitched until the sixth and Brown finished. Canton had 10 hits. Farmington nine, Phil Scott was 3-for-5 and Brown 2-for-4. Mitchell had three RBI on a two-run double and a bases-

loaded walk.

The Falcons, who are 5-10 overall, lost a doubleheader Wednesday at St. Clair Shores Lakeview, 5-2 and 7-6.

In a tournament at Blissfield April 19, Farmington had the lead in all three games and lost each one to Bay City Central, Blissfield and Monroe.


"We had a lot of growing pains," Farmington coach Pete Finn said. "We're just trying to find the right combination of

guys in the right spots.

"I was hoping we would focus a little better at the Blissfield tournament. We had flashes of good play but nothing consistent right now.

"We've had three extra-inning games. I know we've played enough. I just want to make sure we're playing the right way. We played better (Friday)."

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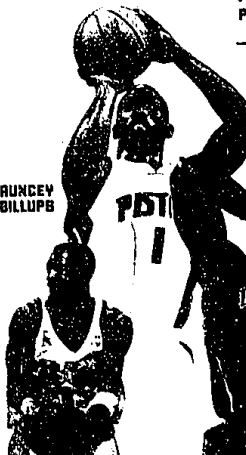
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