

Football Play-Offs: All play versus Football Play-off Proposal

As schools request to move from conferences in order to gain entrance into the WIAA football play-off series because of enrollment mismatches and competition levels, the call for all-play in football play-offs has risen once again.

History

The WFCB Board of Directors and Executive Board repeatedly had discussions about all schools being included in the WIAA football play-offs. The majority of the responses were that the schools, which did not do well during the regular season, did not wish to get beat by a lop-sided score.

The WFCB conducted a survey in 2001 of head football coaches and athletic directors. The results were instrumental in the decision to not go to an all inclusive football play-off system.

- 283 head coaches responded (67 % return). The results were:
 - 56 to change to an all-inclusive play-off system
 - 227 to keep the current play-off system.
- 237 athletic director separate survey responses (55% return):
 - Q1 - Favor All-Play - 21.5% Yes, 78.5% No;
 - Q2 - Would All-Play affect your view on re-alignment? 11% Yes, 57% No, 31% Not-Applicable

In the fall of 2001, the WFCB requested a 7th division be added in football when the non-public schools were admitted in to the WIAA in order to provide opportunities to the public schools since the additional schools would reduce the number of slots available. The 7th division was added in the 2002 football season.

As schools continue to make requests to move to conferences which are nearer the enrollment of their school, it creates a dilemma for the rest of the conference members. Among the factors cited is that schools must win 50 percent of their conference games to qualify for the football play-offs. Many times the schools consistently qualifying for the play-offs are the larger schools in the conference. Therefore, some are asking for all schools to be included in the football play-offs.

Eight school football districts

In order to alleviate some of these concerns in **football only**, a proposal is in place to divide the state into seven divisions. The divisions would consist of eight districts of eight schools. The largest 64 schools will play in division one with the next 64 schools in the following divisions. The remaining 44 would be assigned to division seven (or if the interest has risen, would play reduced-man football). Non-varsity games would be scheduled against traditional conference opponents.

2008*			2009**		
	Max. enrollment	Min. enrollment		Max. enrollment	Min. enrollment
Div 1	2542	1458	Div 1	2301	1352
Div 2	1445	939	Div 2	1345	862
Div 3	932	555	Div 3	855	497
Div 4	554	354	Div 4	493	348
Div 5	352	268	Div 5	335	247
Div 6	267	213	Div 6	247	177
Div 7	212	91	Div 7	176	74

* 2008 numbers are based on the field of 224 qualifying schools.
 ** 2009 numbers are based on the 429 football playing schools 2009 enrollments.

Within the districts, schools will have week one to schedule non-district games with traditional rivals or other opponents. District games will be played during weeks two through eight. Week nine will be the last game of the regular season and the first week of the play-offs for qualifying teams.

Teams, which finish in first through fourth place in district, will advance to the play-offs. (Tiebreakers must be used to determine district places.) The teams, which finish in the lower portion of their respective district—places five through eight, would be matched with schools, which also finished in places five through eight. The higher seeded team would host through Level 3. If opponents have identical seeds, the team that has hosted the least would host. Level 4 games would be played at neutral sites.

Districts would be matched up against one another during level one based on geography, e.g. east/west or north/south. The first place winner would take on the fourth place finisher of the other district. Second place finishers would play the third place finishers. In addition, the lower placing teams would play another school from another district based on geography (One example is fifth place finishers playing fifth place finishers. Sixth place finishers playing one another, etc.)

While many will ask “why are we not maintaining traditional conference lines for football,” the object of this proposal is to create districts based on enrollment for better competition for **all** member schools. In addition, this proposal guarantees a nine game schedule. Lower level games can be scheduled against the existing conference opponents in other sports.

Advantages of this proposal would be:

- The football season remains at nine football games.
- Schools would be in districts based on enrollment.
- Groupings would be developed using criteria similar to that applied to other sports.
- Week one games can be used to schedule traditional or historical games.
- Schools will only be required to find one non-district game, which is the common week one.
- All games during the season would be played on Friday or Saturday with some exceptions when travel may be a consideration.
- Utilizing this schedule, the season would limit games to one game per week, which would eliminate the Thursday/Tuesday/Saturday play-off week.
- Schools would have nine games with seven district games and a week nine game guaranteed.
- Competition levels in week nine games would be comparable and competitive.
- Coaches would know ahead of time who their playoff opponents might be.
- Travel costs can be reduced by scheduling non-varsity games within a region and having eight district games.
- Pressure on conference realignment may be decreased as schools are placed based on enrollment.
 - Rice Lake – Division 3 playing in a Division 1 conference
 - Rhinelander leaving the Wisconsin Valley – six schools
 - Merrill has returned to the Wisconsin Valley – seven schools
 - Northland Pines seeking Michigan affiliation
 - Horicon looking to go to the Trailways Conference
 - Ashland wants to play in Wisconsin
 - Odd numbered conferences are difficult to schedule bye weeks
 - Three six-team conferences looking for four non-conference games
 - Several schools are experiencing problems scheduling non-conference games

The plan would be revisited after four years and enrollments would be examined after two years in order to realign districts.

Other items for consideration:

- Implementation could be as early as the fall of 2010.
- Final decision could be made as early as the January 2010 Board of Control meeting.
- Games scheduled in 2010 and beyond with out-of-state opponents in weeks 2-9 would need to be dropped.
- The scheduling of officials would need to be done by an existing commissioner or perhaps a local officials association.
- Any school currently not playoff eligible would become eligible upon implementation of this plan. Everyone starts with a clean slate.
- District awards would be given. It might be beneficial for districts to follow the WFCAs awards policy.