

Pennsylvania is better off with current 4-class system

**By Joshua Funk
For PA Football News**

Sometimes, it's good to stick with the same old, same old. That was the case July 24 when a 15-13 vote blocked a potential proposal to add two classifications to Pennsylvania high school football and shorten the season to only 15 weeks.

Four classes and 16 weeks of football will stay with us for at least another two years. Thank God for that. I actually was sweating this one out, worrying that the PIAA football championships would be minus a cornerstone district in the WPIAL.

Maybe I'm too much of a traditionalist in some respects. Having always been around a four-class format for as long as I've been following football (since 1995), it just seems logical to stick with it.

Thank goodness the current system stayed in place for the 598 schools that play football. Who knows what would have happened had the six-class idea gone through and the WPIAL had dropped out of the PIAA playoffs? Then, there would have been six state champions for just over 470 affiliated schools (474 to be exact).

Talk about watering down the system. That would have meant that there would have been one state champion for every 79 schools. The only solace from that stat is that a Pennsylvania state title with that ratio would *still* be more significant than one won in New Jersey.

Yes, two weeks of scrimmages and 16 weeks of games sounds like quite a lot, but sit down and think about a couple of things for just a minute.

One, only eight teams play a full 16 games. Just eight. Two teams from each classification. That's 1.3 percent of the PIAA member schools that play football.

16 teams play 15 games; 32 teams play 14 games; 64 teams play 13 games. Those percentages come to 2.6, 5.3, and 10.7, respectively. So really, the percentages of teams playing even a baker's dozen of games in a season is just over a 1:10 ratio.

Sure, there are some effects of wear and tear for Class "A" and smaller "AA" schools that play further and further into the season. And there will always be folks who want to play the "numbers game" with enrollment figures, especially at the "AAAA" level when smaller schools in the west might have to face large eastern schools from suburban Philadelphia or the Lehigh Valley.

But time and time again, it's been proven that a larger enrollment doesn't guarantee you championships. If the school with the larger enrollment always won, then here's a few instances where championship results would have been reversed:

- General McLane would not have beaten Pottsville in 2006.
- Neither McKeesport *or* Upper St. Clair would have beaten Bethlehem Liberty in consecutive years. (Liberty would be 3-0 in PIAA finals if the larger enrollment school won).
- Thomas Jefferson would not have defeated Garnet Valley.
- Pittsburgh Central Catholic would not have beaten Parkland (2007) or Neshaminy (2001).
- Jeannette, a Class "A" school by enrollment that plays up to "AA," wouldn't have beaten Dunmore.

There are other instances where this has happened before, but you get the idea. The whole idea of equality in terms of opposition might be important to some, but not here and not to me. Quite frankly, it doesn't matter if a Class "A" school is playing a "AAA," or a "AA" playing a "AAAA," or a small "AAAA" playing a very large "AAAA."

Enrollment size plays no bearing on work ethic. It plays no role in off-season workouts and conditioning. It doesn't help you in 7-on-7 passing camps or preseason scrimmages. Enrollment isn't the first person to hoist a District, WPIAL, or PIAA championship trophy.

What matters instead is the heart of each player, the determination to be better, to decide things on the field for those 48 minutes each Friday night. What matters, too, is the coaching, not just the head coach, but all of the assistants. Support from the school board and administration of any district is also critical.

Enrollment plays *zero* factor in any of those above items.

So, all in all, thank goodness Pennsylvania didn't pass the six-classification proposal.

The state is better off without it.