

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

## high schools

◆◆ Sunday, Nov. 7, 1982 15-E

# District One playoffs: Good idea for wrong reason

After three years of silence on the controversial issue of football playoffs, there are new rumblings around District One.

Don't rush out and buy a ticket, but the once-dead topic of District One football playoffs (the idea was voted down, 10-1, in the spring of 1980) is being revived.

District One, to all appearances a well-administered entity, is running at a deficit. The district has lost money the last four years because of its fine practice of funding the teams it sends to state competition.

So the district, like everybody else these days, is seeking a way to expand its revenue base.

The Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) did the logical thing when it scheduled an expansion to four classes for basketball playoffs next year.

Only a few think this move is to get more teams into playoffs. That's a part of it, but the underlying reason is that adding 16 more teams to the state round creates 15 more paydays

By DON McKEE



On high schools

for the PIAA.

There is nothing wrong with that. But many administrations in this area have been implacable foes of football playoffs for years. Now, pressed to support playoffs that exist in nearly every other conceivable sport, the decision-makers find football playoffs intriguing.

I don't know about anyone else, but I find that almost insulting. The district has shunned football playoffs for years, contending that there is no interest in them among the members. (Read, principals.)

Now these same administrators are saying football playoffs could be pos-

sible, but only to pay for the vast array of playoffs in sports that can't support themselves.

In other words, football playoffs are not necessary — until other sports that have playoffs need a financial bail-out.

Oh well, there's an old football saying that the best offense is to take what the defense gives you. If that's the only way to get football playoffs started in a district where few of the good teams meet regularly, then football's proponents have to take it.

And make the most of it. A poorly conceived playoff plan would be worse than none at all, since it would let the sport's enemies say, "I told you so."

The ideal plan would divide the district into four classes with an approximately equal number of teams in each class. Applied to District One, (which will have 63 football-playing schools next year) that would be three classes with 16 teams each and one with 15. Each class could be

---

A poorly conceived playoff plan would be worse than none at all, since it would let the sport's enemies say, 'I told you so.' It would involve the creation of new leagues.

---

divided into two leagues based on geography, with each having seven or eight teams. The top two teams in each league would make the playoffs.

Each team could play a nine- or 10-game schedule ending the first weekend in November. That would permit teams to play geographical rivals the first two or three weeks of the season, then play seven league games. Such a plan would leave two weeks before Thanksgiving to conduct playoffs and would leave Thanksgiving rivalries (another large, and legitimate revenue source) intact.

But such a plan is probably too

regimented to gain immediate acceptance. It would involve the creation of new leagues that are exclusively geared to football, which might disturb traditionalists.

It's difficult to conceive of a decent playoff plan based on the leagues as they now exist, however. First, hardly any finish their seasons early enough to permit playoffs by the PIAA's final playing date, the first weekend of December. Any playoff would therefore mean eliminating early-season, nonleague games in order to start earlier.

Second, most leagues contain

teams in different size classifications. The basketball playoffs can work around this, because they include up to 16 teams per class. In some leagues, the fourth-place finisher makes the playoffs. But such a vast playoff is impossible in football.

New Jersey picks its playoff qualifiers based on the first eight games of the season. That seems unworkable here, where so many decisive games occur in the final two weeks.

That would seem to leave the football-playoff committee with the unsavory task of picking teams based on some sort of power rating, which is nearly as bad as no playoff at all.

Another way — perhaps the only way — is to appoint a blue-ribbon panel of respected former coaches and have the panel pick two teams per class. The panel could meet on the weekend after Thanksgiving, make its choices, and have the two finalists play off on the first weekend in December.

It might boil down to a choice between the panel, and realignment.