

FOOTBALL

The playoff follies: After 53 wins, Bucks were doomed by a tie

Pennsylvania waited the better part of two decades before instituting a state football playoff system.

Let's hope it doesn't take that long for the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association to get it right.

Maybe it's asking a lot to expect the PIAA to get something right the first time around. That's just not Pennsylvania's style.

Remember that slogan, "You've got a friend in Pennsylvania"?

A better phrase for the PIAA playoff format would have been, "You've got no chance in Pennsylvania."

Even when people try to do the right thing here, it gets messed up. Take the state football playoff system. The PIAA brain trust thought it had everything figured out with a neat point system that awarded four points for wins, two for ties and four points for Quad-A scheduling of opponents.

Then Central Bucks West was tied, 14-14, by Central Bucks East on Thanksgiving Day. A death blow was struck for Southeastern Pennsylvania's chances of having a representative in the state playoffs.

The tie ended C.B. West's 53-game winning streak — the nation's longest active winning streak. It also meant West finished the season 10-0-1 while Neshaminy finished its season 11-0.

Under the PIAA's playoff formula, Neshaminy went to the state playoffs because it had a perfect 72 points while the Bucks had 70.

Unless you've been living under a kicking tee this season, you realize that West was a championship-caliber team, the likes of which people haven't seen since *Death Valley Days* was canceled by the networks.

That is not to say Neshaminy was a poor choice to represent District 1. The Redskins just aren't in the Bucks' class.

You didn't need to pick up the newspaper last week to realize Neshaminy was going to get blown out in the opening playoff round by Cedar Cliff. If you follow football in all regions of the state, you knew that was going to happen because Neshaminy was not in Cedar Cliff's class. The District 3 team won, 24-0.

Let's look at C.B. West's and Neshaminy's schedules. Both teams played seven common opponents, the likes of Norristown (5-5-1), Pennridge (0-11), Truman (2-9), Bensalem (3-7)... You get the idea. So we'll toss those games aside.

C.B. West played two tough Quad-A schools, however, in Cardinal O'Hara (8-2) and West Chester Henderson (7-3). Neshaminy played two Quad-A schools on the decline — Downingtown (2-9) and Archbishop Wood (2-8).

The combined record of Neshaminy's opponents was 43-63-3 (.406);

By TIM PANACCIO



West's foes were 55-62-2 (.470).

Had Neshaminy played the Bucks during one of both team's open dates — Neshaminy coach John Champ declined — C.B. West would have crushed the Redskins.

The Bucks should have represented District 1. Neshaminy did so because there are no district playoffs here as there are in Pittsburgh's District 7 (the Western Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic League).

The WPIAL ignored the PIAA's point system and told its member schools that whatever team won the district championship would go to the state playoffs regardless of point totals or record — a sound idea, even if it makes the WPIAL a renegade district that won't play by the rules. People have been saying that about the WPIAL for years because District 7 had more representatives on the PIAA's Board of Control.

Upper St. Clair (10-3) declined to go to the state playoffs, saying it would be an undue burden for its players to play 15 games. (Gimme a break, guys.) So the WPIAL sent runner-up Pittsburgh Central Catholic (9-3-2) as its state representative against Cedar Cliff (14-0).

Imagine that. Central Catholic, the team that gave us Dan Marino (Miami Dolphins) in the late 1970s, is going into the state final with three losses and two ties. Meanwhile, the best team in Pennsylvania, C.B. West, is sitting at home with no losses and a tie.

Archbishop Carroll lost, 6-0, to Archbishop Ryan in the Catholic League football final. There is no shame in that loss. Ryan (10-2) had one of the area's most potent offenses and coach John Quinn (who came out of retirement this season) gave the Raiders his old trademark — a strong defense against the pass.

It was said here earlier this season that Kevin Clancy's Patriots (9-4) would win the Catholic League South and surprise some people. They did just that, too.

In an era of shrinking basketball players, only one team in the 86-school Inquirer Neighbors coverage area has four players 6 feet, 6 inches or taller. This is Glen Mills, which has Anthony Pannell (6-6), James Spears (6-6), Jay Thompson (6-6) and Jamie Peterson (6-8).

Most teams don't have even one player at 6-6.