

IHSAA should reconsider reclassification program

By **Staff Reports** - 2/3/18 12:09 AM



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I didn't bring a stat book, a notepad, a laptop or a camera to the Lloyd E. Scott Gymnasium on Wednesday.

Instead of filling my usual role as a reporter, I wore a different hat and spectated from the sidelines.

It was must-watch girls hoops: Class 4A No. 7 North Harrison versus No. 11 Bedford North Lawrence in the first round of Sectional 15.

Two Goliaths at center court in the third-largest high school gymnasium in the country.

While exciting for any nonpartisan spectator, it was a matchup that probably never should have taken place in the postseason.

Let's rewind: why is North Harrison's girls basketball team currently playing in Class 4A?

In 2013, the IHSAA implemented a system called the success factor rule.

If you're not familiar by now, here's a refresher of the rule.

In team sports, schools are subject to reclassification at the conclusion of a reclassification period (which takes place every two years) on a sport-by-sport basis dependent on the school's tournament success.

A school earns a point for the final level of the tournament series as follows: Sectional championship (one point), regional championship (two points), semistate championship (three points) and state championship (four points).

If a school, in any enrollment, achieves a value of six points or greater in a two-year span, they will move up to the next available higher enrollment class.

In basketball, there are four classes.

Now, if you score three, four or five points over two years when moved up, then the team doesn't drop down a class. If it's fewer than three points, you go back down if your enrollment fits in the class.

Depending on how the reclassification year falls, a team could win back-to-back state titles in its class and not move up.

North Harrison finished as runner-up in the Class 3A state finals in 2016 and 2017. Those teams had records of 28-3 and 27-3.

In this past year's reclassification, North Harrison was one of three Class 3A schools to move up. Heritage Christian and South Bend St. Joseph's — both private schools — advanced to 4A.

Heritage Christian defeated North Harrison in the 2016 state finals, and St. Joseph's topped the Cats in the 2017 state championship game.

This season, the Cats ripped through their schedule again, going 21-2 in the regular season.

Bedford North Lawrence — one of two losses for the Cats in the regular season — topped North Harrison 47-39 on Wednesday, eliminating the Cats from the playoffs.

From back-to-back trips to Bankers Life Fieldhouse to one-and-done, the success factor rule failed the rural public school in Ramsey.

North Harrison has an enrollment of 689, according to the IHSAA, which would place it 159 of 201 in Class 3A. They're the second-smallest school behind Heritage Christian (407) in 4A.

Why should a team be forced to move up a class if it hasn't won a state championship in the reclassification period?

North Harrison has never won a state title in any sport, and Harrison County owns one team state title: Lanesville's baseball team was crowned champion last spring.

I'm not saying that the Cats would have, without a doubt, taken 3A this season, but they would have been serious contenders for a third-straight year.

What's worse is that North Harrison, due to the way the reclassification period fell, has to play in 4A next year and will be dropped to 3A in 2020 if it doesn't win the 4A semistate in 2019.

So the Cats could win a regional title in 4A and then move down to 3A the next year.

How does that make sense? You could get moved up, have one bad year and then a great year and still get moved down?

Lilly Hatton, who averaged 21.1 points, 8.4 rebounds, 4.2 blocks and 1.6 steals per game this past season and could go down as the best player in school history, is a senior next year.

This isn't the first time that this debacle has happened in girls hoops, but it was a slightly different situation.

Fort Wayne Canterbury finished runner-up to Heritage Christian in the Class 2A state finals in 2014 and 2015.

It moved up to 3A for 2016 and 2017. In those two years, the Cavaliers went 1-2 in sectional play. They now play in 2A again.

On the flip side, Fort Wayne Canterbury owns five state championships in Class A.

It's a similar premise, though.

That shouldn't have been the final game for those six seniors at North Harrison.

There needs to be an amendment to the success factor, but I don't know if it will happen any time soon.

Look at Providence volleyball, for example.

The Pioneers won back-to-back state championships in 2013 and 2014 and then again in 3A in 2015. In 2016, they were runner-up for 3A and moved up to 4A this year. This past fall, the Pioneers won both the sectional and regional.

Stepping even further back, the rule was originally intended to solve the problems with football in the postseason — mainly the bigger schools in Indianapolis.

Attendance had dropped at the state finals with the huge blowouts in the tournament. Now, with the success factor in place and six classes, there have been more state champions than in years past, and it's a mix of public and private schools.

From what I'm told following the game, North Harrison's coach, Missy Voyles, dismissed questions regarding the success factor.

At the end of the game, the Cats left the court with their heads held high. I didn't see any sulking or tears on the court before or after handshakes.

Classy moves by the Cats all-around.

They left everything they could on the court against a program that has largely dominated in Class 4A over recent years in BNL.

So what's the solution to all of this nonsense?

I say require a team to have won a state tournament and reconfigure the point system.

Why have class basketball if you can't win a championship against schools similar in size?