

Sports

## Abrupt prep soccer changes disturb coaches

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The North Carolina High School Athletic Association made the decision earlier this month to move to penalty kicks in regular-season soccer games if there is no winner after two 10-minute overtime periods.

Previously, games during the regular season ended in a draw if neither team scored during the overtime periods.

The proposal, submitted by the Eastern Plains Conference, wanted to eliminate ties for conference games only, according to coaches. Instead, the rule was applied to all games.

“They said they had a conference that wanted this proposal, so they asked if we would survey our membership,” said Doug Kidd, president of the North Carolina High School Soccer Coaches Association. “We sent that out to our coaches, only 98 responded and 51 percent were against it and 49 percent were for it. So I sent those into the (NCHSAA) thinking there’s no way that’s moving forward. Then we never heard anything back.”

NCHSAA commissioner Que Tucker said the association’s board believed it was its responsibility to break the tie — ironically — between coaches and vote on the issue.

“The idea was to play the games like the playoffs would be and to make it uniform (for all conferences),” NCHSAA president Joe Poletti added.

It was a decision that came out of the blue for coaches.

“You never see what’s on these agendas for these high school athletic association meetings,” Kidd said. “So, you don’t know what’s on there. They aren’t very transparent. If we would have known it was going to be on (the agenda), we would’ve been all over it, going ‘no, ties are fine.’ We never heard anything until it came out that day.”

Opinions differ on the issue, but many area coaches aren’t pleased with a decision that happened so quickly.

“It takes advantage of the most consistent teams. What I mean by that is you’ve proven which teams can be better all the way through,” Western Alamance girls’ soccer coach Rafael Pecanha said. “You play the regular game which is 80 minutes, then two 10-minute overtimes and if it remains tied and you go to (penalty kicks), you’ve proven all the qualities of your team. The team with the most qualities will get the victory.”

Southern Alamance girls’ soccer coach Andrew Carroll said he doesn’t mind the change because two overtime periods will still exist before going to penalties.

“I’m OK with it. At least in the U.S., we expect to have an outcome. In European ball, they look at a bigger picture of how everyone lines up,” Carroll said. “In my opinion, as long as it was for at least the two 10-minute (overtime periods), and we don’t go straight to penalty kicks, it at least gives an opportunity for some more fair play. If your team has a great goalie, or the other team has a really poor goalie, it can pretty much be decided based on one player instead of 11 players.”

But with the positives come the negatives.

“Everybody (in conference) has to come to our field and we have to go to everybody else’s field,” Pecanha said. “So with eight teams in the conference, that puts us at 14 games, plus non-conference teams that we are somewhat forced to play. ... You have to play a lot of minutes in a short period of time.”

The concern with longer games is later nights for the athletes, who often have homework and school the next day. The penalty-kick phase would extend games.

“I couldn’t imagine playing two games in a week, say two of them are away. We’ve got to play 100 minutes in an away game and then we have to turn around and drive home,” Williams High School boys’ and girls’ soccer coach Jeremy Krist said. “In our conference, we’ve got to drive an hour to get to Southwestern Randolph for a conference game. Kids still have to do homework and they need to recover. I don’t like it at all.”

Kidd, also the boys’ and girls’ coach at Swansboro, says the coaches association is working on trying to come up with a better solution.

“I always believe if you’re going to criticize something, you should have a suggestion of how to fix it. So, we’re in the works of trying to figure out what’s a better way to fix this problem,” Kidd said. “What I think the underlying issue is they want all conferences to be the same rules, because right now it’s up to each individual conference to decide how they want to break the ties. We’re in the process of starting to get input from our coaches and figure out what’s a better way to do this.”

Kidd said he isn’t sure if a change would be made before the fall season because changes to policy happen at the NCHSAA board meetings in May and December.

What seems to anger the coaches the most is the fact they weren’t aware this was going to be voted on.

“There needs to be more transparency from the high school athletic association,” Kidd said. “Technically, they work for the schools. We pay a membership fee to be a part of it and their salaries are based off that. Instead of them working for us, it’s almost like we’re working against each other instead of working together.”