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Home ▶ News Ticker ▶ Don Owen: Unless KHSAA adjusts quickly, football playoffs doomed to same fate as Sweet 16 basketball

Don Owen: Unless KHSAA adjusts quickly, football playoffs doomed to same fate as Sweet 16 basketball

Nov 9th, 2020 · 0 Comment



Covington Catholic's winning streak on the gridiron is over. And, unless something incredible happens soon, the remainder of the prep football season in Kentucky is in serious jeopardy as well.

The Kentucky High School Athletic Association announced Saturday it is delaying the upcoming playoffs until the weekend of Nov. 19-20 because of the pandemic. Instead of simply eliminating the first round — which has been a sad lineup of blowout games for years — the KHSAA pushed back the season yet another week. To the very edge of winter, in fact.

Now, according to the KHSAA, the state championship games will be played the third week of December. Yes, that's correct. Think of the wind chill and possible snow, not to mention the potential for ice on the roads.

The opening round of the playoffs is jokingly known as "Running Clock Friday" due to all the mismatches in the watered-down playoff system. Are they going to call this year's state championship weekend "Frostbite Friday" or "Snowball Saturday" if it's actually played? Did anyone at the KHSAA review the average temperatures the past 10 years in Lexington during the middle of December? Was a medical expert consulted about the potential dangers of playing football outside in mid-December weather during a pandemic?

No, probably not, and let's hope so.

So what should the KHSAA do if the playoffs do resume? First, get creative and tweak the current playoff format. It might cause some hurt feelings, but this is a pandemic and nothing is fair. Here are a few suggestions:

- Take only the top two teams in each district — and keep doing that from this point forward every season. The first-round blowouts have become pointless. Unless you're the scoreboard operator on "Running Clock Friday."



Dayton players celebrate after defeating Bellevue and winning the Battle for the Paddle trophy. (Photo by Jeff McCurry)

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Look at several of last season's first-round results. Beechwood posted a 63-0 win over Holy Cross. Raceland cruised to a 77-0 triumph against Betsy Layne. Trinity squeaked past Marshall County by a 63-0 score. Boyle County edged Anderson County, 64-14. McCracken County pulled out a 57-0 win over Apollo. Paintsville rolled to a 67-0 victory over Fairview. And these were all playoff games.

•Go to three classes for this season's playoffs and take only the top 16 teams via the RPI in each class. That's a total of 48 teams that qualify for the playoffs. It's not breaking news that Kentucky's population is much too small for six classes.

Divide the total number of schools that play varsity football (218) and their enrollments by three to get the new classes. The largest 73 schools are in Class 3A, the middle 73 are in Class 2A and the remaining 72 schools are in Class 1A. It took me all of 10 minutes to figure it out. I'm sure those in authority at the KHSAA could do the same.

How about Beechwood or Lexington Christian vs. Pikeville in a Class 1A championship contest? Pikeville didn't have one competitive playoff game en route to last year's Class 1A state championship. The Panthers won their playoff contests by scores of 45-12, 54-14, 36-7, and then 43-0 in the state finals against Paintsville. Pikeville has an outstanding program, but you have think the players and coaches would have enjoyed a bit more competition.



Highlands linebacker Jack Cavanaugh (3) stops CovCath's Owen Nally. (Photo by Dale Dawn)

Imagine CovCath going up against Trinity in the Class 3A title game. Boyle County and Johnson Central, two teams that met last season in the Class 4A state title game, were on a collision course this year as well. That would be the Class 2A finale in the adjusted alignment.

If either or both wish to play up in Class 3A, that's fine as well. Boyle County and Johnson Central, according to most observers, are among the top five teams in the state regardless of classification.

•If the KHSAA insists on using the current alignment for this season, skip ahead to the semifinal rounds with the top four teams in each of the six classes. Use the power ratings to determine those top four teams. That's two weekends of football and six champions crowned the first week of December.

Otherwise, the virus-altered football campaign might join last season's Sweet 16 basketball event and the spring sports as canceled before completion. Which would be very unfortunate.

ON A MORE UPLIFTING NOTE, Holmes extended its winning streak to six with a 20-0 win at Newport

Central Catholic on Friday night. The Bulldogs collected their first shout of the season and improved to 7-2.

Quantez Calloway rushed for 121 yards and two touchdowns to lead Holmes. Calloway also picked off a pair of passes as the Bulldogs forced five turnovers against NewCath.

Tayquan Calloway — Quantez's twin brother — finished with 104 yards on 19 carries, while Curtez Hill added 69 yards on just seven carries. Holmes is ranked No. 8 in the latest Class 4A state poll.

NewCath, which won its first six games of the season, lost for the second straight week and is 6-2. The Thoroughbreds are the top seed for the local Class 1A district playoffs.

THE STREAK ENDED for CovCath on Friday night during a 29-28 loss at Lexington Catholic. CovCath owned a 22-game winning streak going into the contest. The Colonels had not lost since Dec. 2, 2018, when South Warren posted a 20-16 victory over CovCath in the Class 5A state championship game in Lexington.

It marked the first regular-season loss for CovCath since a 35-28 setback against Scott County on Oct. 28, 2016. The Colonels won their next 37 regular-season games, going 10-0 in 2017, 2018 and 2019, and 7-0 to start the 2020 campaign.

Don Owen is sports editor of the Northern Kentucky Tribune. Contact him at don@nkytrib.com and follow him on Twitter at [@dontribunesport](https://twitter.com/dontribunesport).



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