

FHSAA athletic directors approve plan to reseed football state semifinal round

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The Florida High School Athletic Association is one step closer to changing its bracketing procedure for football state semifinal games.

The association's athletic directors advisory committee voted 14-1 Wednesday to reseed state semifinal teams in each classification using the FHSAA power rating system. The No. 1 ranked team would host the No. 4 team and the No. 2 team would host the No. 3 team under the new format, based on ratings that would include region tournament results.

The initial proposal called for using only final regular season rankings to seed semifinal teams but was amended by the committee to include all postseason games.

The recommendation, which has had overwhelming support from both ADs and football coaches in the past, only needs final approval from the FHSAA board of directors on Feb. 22.

The change puts an end to the long-standing practice of Region 1 and Region 2 champions and Region 3 and Region 4 champions always

meeting in state semifinal games. That North-South format was established long ago to limit travel for qualifying teams.

FHSAA coordinator of athletics Frank Beasley stated that the football advisory committee came up with the idea two years ago in hopes of mirroring the semifinal seeding system that had been put in place for boys and girls basketball in 2019-20.

Beasley said updated football ratings and matchups would be made available on the morning following region championship games. That means schools traveling for semifinal games will have just six days to make accommodations.



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The AD advisory committee also spent 40 minutes Wednesday discussing a football reclassification plan based on geography. The proposal, which failed to gain endorsement by an 8-7 vote, would have split schools into rural, suburban and metro classifications and include divisions based on competitive balance and school enrollment, among other factors.

Schools have traditionally been placed in FHSAA classifications based solely on school enrollment size.

"The football committee felt like we need to look at doing something different," said Beasley. "There were several different options thrown out, several different models looked at, and a bunch of data presented. What came out of that was a very broad scope of reclassification."

Although athletic directors were not receptive to the proposal as written, numerous comments were made in favor of exploring a change to the "archaic way of classifying based on population," as Clay County District Schools representative John Sgromolo put it.

The non-endorsement slows progress toward changing the way teams are classified, but does not put an end to that conversation. The football coaches advisory committee can reevaluate the topic and present a new plan when it meets again following the 2021 season.

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"It's not that the conversation doesn't need to take place," said Scott Drabczyk of Daytona Beach Father Lopez. "But there needs to be something more concrete than 'we're going to endorse a conversation to change the system' unless there's more brought to the table."

Athletic districts voted unanimously for the second time against two football-related items brought forth by the FHSAA officials advisory committee. The AD's expressed concerns over increasing the cost of paying for officials.

The measures would have called for paid officials to be added to work the chains and for another referee to be added to the officiating crew to operate the play clock during postseason games.

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