

FHSAA scraps Metro-Suburban but tables Open Division talk

[Buddy Collings](#) December 12, 2023 at 6:40 p.m.

Seminole defender Jovan Kendrick chased DeLand quarterback T.J. Moore (5) in a game this season between teams that went separate ways at playoff time. DeLand was in the Suburban division, Seminole was in Metro. Next fall they are likely to be back in the same classification after Tuesday's vote by the FHSAA's board of directors. (Stephen M. Dowell/Orlando Sentinel)

In a disjointed two-hour Tuesday virtual meeting that had more zig zags than a Formula 1 road race, the Florida High School Athletic Association's beleaguered board of directors scrapped the two-year-old [Metro vs. Suburban football split](#) but did not act on a much-debated counter proposal that would create [Open Division playoff brackets](#) for major sports.

The 13-person board tabled the Open discussion but did make an important decision by voting 9-4 to continue required district play for football teams that sign on for state series competition in the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years. That allows the FHSAA staff to move forward in reclassifying those teams, which in turn permits member

schools to finalize their 10-game football schedules for the next two-year cycle.

The board also voted 9-4 in favor of having eight classifications for all major team bracket sports with a 32-team Rural division for small schools staying intact. All other state series teams will be placed in Classes 1A through 7A in a realignment process based on October 2023 student enrollment counts for grades 9-12.

That scraps the Metro/Suburban divide and takes football back to the familiar format used through 2021 — where teams play regular-season games against every opponent in their district (typically 4-6 teams) and first-place teams get automatic state playoff bids. Regional brackets are then filled by at-large teams that earn berths based on power rankings generated by MaxPreps.

Ahead of Tuesday's meeting, FHSAA executive director Craig Damon recommended in the agenda notes that the board approve a plan to add eight-team Open divisions for 15 sports. That decision was shelved — at least for the time being — as board president Monica Colucci, a Miami-Dade school board representative, advised the group to focus on regular-season football policy and take on playoff structure at a later date.

The Open concept, recommended by a new Classification Task Force after a number of group conversations this year, is now up in the air but may not be dead.

It is possible that a motion could be made in the next board meeting (scheduled for Feb. 26) to approve the plan brought forth by Damon to pull the eight highest-ranked teams out of traditional classifications to

create Open championships.

The 15 sports considered for Open are football, baseball, softball, flag football, girls beach volleyball along with girls and boys programs in basketball, soccer, lacrosse, water polo and indoor volleyball.

Some board members said their constituents are in favor of the Open plan; others said exactly the opposite.

Similarly, recent FHSAA surveys showed member schools favor the idea but not by a major margin.

"I'm a big proponent of Open Division," said The Master's Academy athletic director Trevor Berryhill, the Central Florida private school representative.

Ryan Smith, athletic director for The Benjamin School in Palm Beach Gardens, said South Florida schools he represents favor the Open option and have been very much against the Metro label that reduced the number of football championships available for the state's most populated counties.

South Sumter principal Allen Shirley, the Central Florida representative for public schools, was one who said the Metro/Suburban split has improved competitive balance and voted against the return to alignment based solely on enrollment. He strongly favored keeping mandatory district football play.

Board members Paul Selvidio, another private school administrator, and Ricky Bell, retired Leon County public schools athletics director, suggested that the Open Division could be reserved for powerhouse teams that choose to opt in — rather than be required to.

Varsity Content Editor Buddy Collings can be reached by email at bcollings@orlandosentinel.com.