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When the merciful end comes to the Kansas High School Activities Association, thousands of student athletes will be free from an oppressive system that fought hard to deny them opportunities to enjoy competitive sports but that same organization was lazy when it came to implementing sound policies that would have enhanced the learning environment by utilizing activities as a positive in the lives of Kansas children.

Several indications are that the end is near for KSHSAA, and the final epitaph will more than likely read, "Death from self-inflicted wounds."

The most recent gunshot to the foot is occurring with KSHSAA's approach to Class 4A's recommendation to split into two divisions.



EARL WATT

It is a well-thought plan that is favored by nine of the classification's 13 leagues. It only required nine of the original 13 colonies to ratify the Constitution, but despite the overwhelming support of its own schools to adjust its own classification, the staff at KSHSAA took it upon itself to add three pages at the end of a 20-plus page report put together by the Class 4A schools to rail against the decision in an effort to discourage the Board from accepting the proposal.

It's just the newest chapter in a history of working against the schools they represent. Class 4A is proposing a vote of the overall KSHSAA board to split their 64-team classification into two 32-team divisions, the same as Classes 5A and 6A. This does not affect other classifications, and the schools advocating for the change provided more than 20 pages of researched evidence as to why the change would be positive and is needed.

But KSHSAA staff added several pages of their own complaining about the proposed change and in effect lobbying the board to reject the proposal.

It's nothing new.

Class 5A has an unusually large number of private schools (six of 32) that win almost all of the championships in the classification, but KSHSAA refuses to recognize it as a problem or to offer an alternative.

As a matter of fact, KSHSAA denies a problem exists at all.

With the Class 4A two division proposal, they again deny any such problem exists.

Like a chain smoker denying cancer, KSHSAA continues to rail against almost every grassroots-driven proposal in an effort to maintain control within the staff, and the board has not countered that by offering new leadership or a new approach.

Because of KSHSAA's lack of recognition of input, the Kansas Legislature has interjected and is proposing a change to the structure of the KSHSAA Board that will require more parents be involved rather than school district representatives alone.

This is unfortunately necessary because Kansas athletes are the most restricted in the nation.

Unlike other states surrounding Kansas, athletes cannot practice out of season, compete out of season, work together in the summer time except under the strictest circumstances, or have their coaches involved.

KSHSAA misses a golden opportunity to allow these additional practices that would surely enhance Kansas athletes for better chances for scholarship opportunities, but they also miss the opportunity to require eligibility to participate in the extra practices as motivation for these high school athletes to maintain grades during the off-season rather than only when their playing time will be affected.

Not only does Class 4A have the largest number of schools with 64, but they also have the largest disparity ratio in range from the smallest to the largest schools in the classification.

Since the lazy KSHSAA staff never offered any better plan, the 4A schools looked into a solution themselves, and created a good one.

But the inactive KSHSAA staff suddenly found the energy to fight the plan like a smoker holding on to that last pack while breathing from an oxygen tube.

“Will other classes ask for the same split?” they argue, as if that was a reason not to consider the proposal.

Again, they use themselves to justify inaction, saying, “The Student Advisory Team discussed the concept of dividing Class 4A ... and showed little interest in the idea.”

Forget the fact that 70 percent of Class 4A wants the change, 8 percent wants it to stay the same, and 22 percent don't care.

The translation for the KSHSAA staff is simple, "It might mean more work for us, so we don't want to do it."

Despite the overwhelming evidence that this is a good idea, and that the Class 4A schools want to do it, I fully expect a negative vote when the board addresses the issue in June. Schools like Hugoton and Ulysses, who are on the opposite spectrums of the class size, would be split, and both would benefit by seeing comparable competition for titles.

KSHSAA doesn't care about that. They complain about finding referees, too many champions, and that the proposal is driven by those wanting to make everyone "feel good about their chances."

That vote will certainly be the final dagger to the heart of an organization that has become more focused on its own identity rather than the students it was intended to serve, and I for one will be glad to send flowers when the organization is finally put to rest and a service-oriented organization takes its place.

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