SPORTS NEWS

Half a student and postseason roundup

WITH all that is going on in high-school sporting events this week, it's hard to prioritize the order of things, so let's start with something is neither a game nor a meet. And that is the Morrison school board voting to join the Northwest Upstate Illinois Conference beginning in the 2024-25 year.

This should come as no surprise, as it has been talked about since fellow rival west on Highway 30, Fulton, joined the league a couple years ago. Besides being close rivals, Morrison and Fulton have almost identical enrollments and fit in nicely with NUIC demographics and geography.

Here's an interesting tidbit on the enrollment between the two schools. The IHSA lists Fulton at 286 students and Morrison as 286.5. One would not think that to be too big of a deal, but it really is.

The IHSA 1A/2A cut-off for baseball, basketball, softball and volleyball is 286. Fulton just makes it under that mark, while Morrison finds itself relegated to 2A for the extra half of a student.

The reason for the .5 student is that the IHSA takes the last two years of a school's enrollment, which in Morrison's case was 573 and divides it in half. This is akin to the statement, "your (one) vote counts", as does that one extra student Morrison had.

At least there will be 10 football-playing schools beginning in 2024, with Dakota, Du-Pec, EPC, Forreston, Fulton, Galena, Le-Win, Morrison, Stockton and West Carroll. All but Du-Pec and WC have won state grid championships.

Andy Colbert

Big 2A sectional baseball game between Byron and Wheaton Academy on May 25. WA won its regional by a combined 21-0, while the Tigers had a much tougher road with North Boone in the regional final.

Since WA is from a different area, it's hard to get a read on them. Another factor for post-season play is how coaches use their pitching staff.

Do you save an ace for the next game, yet risk not getting there? Or, do you use the opposite strategy?

Softball doesn't have to worry about that and the 1A sectional at Forreston this past week looks wide open with any of the four remaining teams capable of winning. Top-seed Orangeville only won its regional by one run and the same with upstart South Beloit over long-time power Dakota.

The sectional opposite of Forreston is too close to call also, with the No. 4, 5 and 7-ranked teams in the state according to MaxPreps.

There were also some close games in 2A baseball, with Stillman Valley suffering a 6-5 loss to Rock Falls, who then lost in extra inning to Rockford Christian. Credit to Oregon for pulling out an eight-inning win over Mendota to get a regional win.

Likewise with the lower-seeded Hawk softball team over Winnebago.

In girls track & field, Winnebago came home with the 1A state championship trophy with a 50-48 win over Seneca. As usual, the Indians used their distance running strength to win their first-ever title after taking second and third the past two seasons.

What 'Bago lacked in the sprints, fellow BNC member Rockford Christian made up for it with wins in the 400 and 800-meter relays, cancelling out points highly-seeded Seneca would have gotten. By finishing ahead of Seneca in both races, RC kept Seneca from getting three points, just enough for Winnebago to win.

In the boys meet this weekend, Forreston-Polo has high hopes for bringing back medals in the 400, 800 and 1,600 relay. All three events are on target to finish that way.

Oregon was in danger of not having a state qualifier for the first time in several decades until 200-meter runner Aidan Guida got second place in the next-to-last event of the sectional.

In basketball, the IHSA is changing the way free throws are awarded. Instead of 1-and-1 after seven fouls, teams will be given two shots. It is a means to cut down on physical play.

Another consideration being looked at is rescheduling the basketball state finals, so that teams do not have to play two games in one day, such as is done for the third-place games.

The school of thought is allowing teams to make it at least a two-day event. A couple proposals are in the works, but I have an easier solution – simply eliminate the third-place game.

It serves no purpose other than a consolation reward.

Since his boys Garrett and Jordan were tearing it up on the track for Oregon 15 years ago, Duke Thomas of Chana has made it a point to bring me some of his home-grown asparagus each year at this time. I guess that's one of the side benefits of being a reporter. And his asparagus is as tender as it gets.

Andy Colbert is a long-time Ogle County resident with years of experience covering sports and more for multiple area publications.

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