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ASHEBORO - Beginning in the fall, winning a conference championship in high school will not guarantee that team a berth into the state tournament. That's one of the proposals that the NCHSAA Board of Directors passed recently, which will take effect next season, the first under the new eight-classification realignment in North Carolina.

The NCHSAA Board voted on many proposals to determine playoff participation beginning next year, including basing team playoff participants solely on their RPI ranking. This was the final year in which conference champions or conference tournament champions received an automatic berth and the remaining field was filled by team's RPI rankings. Beginning in the fall, each team's RPI number will now be used to determine the playoff fields.



"There's no doubt about it," Asheboro High School Athletic Director Wes Berrier said when asked if next season's schedules would have been different had school officials known the new playoff procedure. "I guarantee we would have sat down and put our heads together and figured out what's going to be the best for the program. You are going to have to strategize your schedule."

RPI is a complicated formula that weighs each team's winning percentage, its opponents' winning percentage and its opponents' opponents' winning percentage. The RPI was revamped for next year, giving a 40 percent weight on a team's winning percentage, a 40 percent weight on their opponents' winning percentage, and a 20 percent weight on the winning percentage of their opponents' opponents. From 2021-2025, the RPI formula was 30 percent of a team's own winning percentage, 40 percent of the opponents' average winning percentage and 30 percent of the opponents' opponents' average winning percentage. The new formula will give more weight to each team's winning percentage.

"I think it has positives and negatives," said SWR's Matt Kiser, who will assume head AD duties in the fall. "One of the negatives for me is if you have an important player or two injured at the beginning of the season and you don't do really well in the non-conference season, but they get healthy for the conference season and win it, but you don't get rewarded for that. You still have those early-season losses and it doesn't matter that you have dealt with adversity."

Kiser said SWR more than likely wouldn't have made changes to their fall schedules, but future schedules would be more scrutinized.

"I don't believe we would have changed anything, but I'm sure there are schools who would have," Kiser said. "Not knowing how teams were going to determine the playoffs is difficult." Talented teams in conferences that may not have a lot of talent will see a decline in their RPI numbers, which means their seeding for the playoffs will be affected.

"Most of the conferences are down to five or six teams, so teams will be able to load up the non conference schedule to to offset the conference schedule," Trinity High School Athletic Director Robert Mitchell said. "Times change, everything changes. It will be interesting to see how things play out."

Some board members raised concerns about not guaranteeing conference champions a playoff berth. However, with so many split conferences in the upcoming realignment, most board members felt it was going to be difficult to guarantee berths.

With 48 teams making the playoffs in 1-A through 7-A classes and 24 teams qualifying in the 8-A class, the board felt it was unlikely a conference champion would be left out of the playoffs based on their RPI.

In other proposals that passed:

### **Swimming & Diving**

Instead of holding three regional championships in swimming and diving, the NCHSAA will hold two regional championships - one in the East, one in the West. Two state championships will be held concurrently.

### **Golf**

Boys golf will hold three regional championships and girls golf will hold two regional championships. In the state meet, one class will start off the front nine and another will start off the back nine, allowing the NCHSAA to hold two state championships at one location.

### **Wrestling**

The number of wrestlers qualifying for the individual state championships will drop from 16 to 8. There will be two regional championships in each classification, with the top four from each regional advancing to the state championships. For boys wrestling, the 1-A and 2-A classifications will have a combined championship, but the other six classifications will each have their own. On the girls side, the 1-A, 2-A, 3-A, and 4-A classifications will wrestle in a combined tournament, while the 5-A, 6-A, 7-A, and 8-A classifications will each have their own championships.

### **Cross Country**

In the 1-A through 7-A classifications, the NCHSAA will hold three regional championships. There will be two regional championships at the 8-A classification. The top six teams and the top seven individuals not on a qualifying team will advance to the state championships.

The state championships will move to a two-day event with four classifications competing each day.

## **Indoor Track & Field**

The NCHSAA will keep 12 entries in all relay events and adjust the number of qualifiers from 16 entries to 12 entries in the individual events.

## **Outdoor Track & Field**

The NCHSAA will keep the top 16 entries in all relay events and in individual events.

## **Tennis**

The NCHSAA will not require conference tournaments be played in tennis. Every school will send two doubles teams and two singles players to a pre-regional to compete for the opportunity to advance to the regional championships.

From the pre-regionals, 16 doubles and 16 singles would advance to regionals. The top two from each regional would advance to the state tournament for a total of eight qualifiers per class.

## **Team qualifications**

The Bylaw Committee determined how many athletes playing a sport would constitute a team.

The board has approved the following definition:

- Swimming & Diving: 6 participating athletes; This is the minimum number of athletes required to have an entry in every event
- Golf: 3 scoring in girls; 4 scoring in boys
- Wrestling: 8 participating wrestlers in boys; 7 participating wrestlers in girls
- Track & Field (Indoor & Outdoor): At least 2 participating athletes for boys and girls
- Cross Country: At least 5 participating athletes for boys and girls
- Tennis: At least 4 participating athletes