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There are still months of meetings, debates and discussions to be held, but if the first draft of the NCHSAA's new realignment becomes fruition, there will be a lot of athletic directors in Randolph County smiling.

The NCHSAA recently released its first draft for the new four-year period, which begins with the 2021-22 school year. The big changes in Randolph County include Eastern Randolph High School dropping to 1-A, Southwestern Randolph High School dropping to 2-A and a new seven-team 1-A/2-A split conference featuring seven Randolph County teams.

Eastern Randolph and Uwharrie Charter Academy would be the 1-A schools in the new conference and Providence Grove, Randleman, SWR, Trinity and Wheatmore would be the 2-A teams.

Asheboro, the only 3-A school in the county, was put into a conference with some familiar and not so familiar names as the Blue Comets would be in a league with Central Davidson, Ledford, Montgomery Central, North Davidson and Oak Grove.

The Cougars have been lobbying to drop to 2-A for a while. If things stand, they get their wish.

"It finally worked out where our numbers put us in 2-A," SWR Athletic Director Chris Chapman said. "We felt it was for a while. Our numbers continue to drop and it will be nice to play schools our size (around 800) and not have to play teams with 1,400."

Having a seven-team all-Randolph County league is certainly something beneficial for the local schools and communities.

"We're excited about it, we won't have to drive by all our county schools to go to league games," Chapman said. "They took travel into consideration quite a bit. We like the financial aspect of it. It also gives us some flexibility for our non league games. We will be able to build some new relationships."

UCA Athletic Director Brad Monroe said he would be very pleased if the proposed conference became a reality.

"It would bridge a lot of rivalries with a lot of schools that just haven't happened yet," Monroe said. "The thing this year is money in athletics. Can you see UCA playing Wheatmore or Randleman or Trinity across the board in all sports? I think the gates would be pretty significant. I think it would be a benefit for both parties, us and the other teams."

Currently, like some local schools, the Eagles must travel a great distance to fulfill their league schedule, traveling to North Rowan among others.

"It sure would be convenient to play teams in our own backyard," Monroe said.

"Geographically, it bodes well for us. Especially with what we are doing right now."

Earlier this year, it was rumored that UCA may be included in the 2-A classification, but when the conferences were announced, UCA remained in the 1-A ranks. Normally, the NCHSAA uses the yearly enrollment to divide member schools into four classifications. This year, the NCHSAA used a formula that included State Cup Points (indicating how well a school's entire athletic program does in postseason play) and Identified Student Percentage (ISP), which is "the number of students in each school who are on some form of government assistance per USDA guidelines.

"We have only been a school for seven years and we've grown a lot quickly in those seven years," Monroe said. "Maybe it's good for us to play at the 1-A level for four more years."

There are still questions for the new split conference, like how 1-A playoff teams will be determined with just two 1-A teams in the league. That will be decided at a later date.

RHS Athletic Director Ryan Dobias said he likes the possibility of an all-Randolph County conference.

"I think it's good for the whole county," Dobias said. "There was clearly an emphasis to cut down on travel and cut expenses with the way things are this year. Next year is when we are going to feel it. Hopefully, you can raise money on other things, but at the end of the day, you make a substantial amount of money at the gate and it takes a lot of money to run an athletic program."

AHS Athletic Director Steve Luck said being in a conference with four Davidson County schools and Montgomery Central would be fine.

"We are very familiar with the Davidson County conference," Luck said. "We would be in a conference where teams travel well. We show up and they show up. We would go into that league and see what we can do."

Luck said he expects to play other Randolph County schools in nonleague action.

"We've already talked to athletic directors and some coaches, we want to play them," Luck said. "It's beneficial for all."