



Ohio High School Athletic Association

Doug Ute, Executive Director

Wednesday, December 13, 2023

TO: Member Schools' Superintendents, Principals and Athletic Administrators

FR: Doug Ute, OHSAA Executive Director

OHSAA Studying Expansion of Tournament Divisions In Seven Competitive Balance Sports

This memo is to inform you that the OHSAA Board of Directors and staff have been discussing expanding tournament divisions in the competitive balance sports of baseball, basketball, soccer, softball and girls volleyball. With many member school administrators and coaches expressing their interest to me on expansion nearly from the time I started as executive director in September 2020, combined with the concern in the enrollment disparity of the teams from the top to the bottom of the larger divisions (see more details on the disparity below), the Board and staff began discussions on the issue earlier this school year. The Board of Directors could act on a proposal as soon as early 2024.

Our No. 1 goal is to do what is best for the student-athletes. The Board and staff regard expansion as being extremely healthy, and it is something we believe you and your participants would support. We have seven tournament divisions in the sport of football, so why not give student-athletes, schools and their communities the same, or at least comparable, opportunities to compete for a state championship in some of our other sports.

During the discussions with the Board and staff, we have studied the number of tournament divisions and formats in other states and have found that several states – including many that have fewer member schools – have more tournament divisions than Ohio. Besides the sport of football, the OHSAA has not had expansion in some of its traditional four-division sports since the late 1980s.

The Board of Directors has been very supportive when discussing this, and I have been pleased that we seem to be on the same page and could possibly have a proposal in front of the Board soon. We will discuss adding tournament divisions in other sports in the future.

Here are some additional notes on potentially expanding tournament divisions:

Membership Feedback/Input:

Details will be announced after the holidays regarding opportunities for school administrators to share feedback on expansion with the OHSAA at both statewide meetings and virtual calls in January. The Association is also continuing to collect input from the various state coaches associations.

Financial Impact:

In general, expansion is not expected to have a major financial impact on the OHSAA. Expansion would not mean playing more tournament contests overall, it simply would be putting the same number of teams into more divisions.

Why Expansion Would Mirror Current Trends in Conference/League Realignment:

As many schools throughout the state have lost enrollment, the trend has been for those schools to leave their conferences or leagues and join ones that more closely resemble them from an enrollment standpoint. Placing schools into tournament divisions with those that have similar enrollments is one of the key elements that would be addressed in expansion.

Enrollment Disparity:

When looking at the current enrollment disparity in Division I in the sports of baseball, basketball, soccer, softball and girls volleyball, the enrollment difference from the top to the bottom of schools in Division I is an average of 939 students, with highs of 955 in boys soccer (an enrollment range of 346 to 1,301); 954 in boys basketball (346 to 1,300); 944 in baseball (356 to 1,300) and 940 in girls volleyball (319 to 1,249). Expansion would likely address this disparity.

Past OHSAA Action:

While the OHSAA Board of Directors has not recently been asked to act on formal proposals specifically on expansion, the Board has heard proposals that addressed the enrollment disparity between the schools at the top to the bottom of Division I

in both 2006 and 2019. The only modification the OHSAA currently has in place addressing that issue is in football, where Division I is comprised of the top 10 percent of schools based on enrollment and the other six divisions are divided as evenly as possible.

The Next Steps:

Any proposed changes in the number of tournament divisions would need to be approved by a majority vote of the OHSAA Board of Directors since those guidelines are part of the OHSAA General Sports Regulations. Should there be any additional elements of a proposal that are part of the OHSAA Bylaws, a vote of the membership would be required where a majority vote of the member school principals is needed for a modification to be approved.

OHSAA