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January 5, 2022

Dear NDHSAA Board Members and Executive Director Mr. Fetsch,

The January NDHSAA board meeting is coming soon, and we would like to share one concern of the current football plan. Our intent with this email is not to criticize the current football plan, but to offer a suggestion from the perspective of a small school and co-op that has often gone back and forth between regions and divisions over the years. Our suggestion...let's not penalize success and limit a team's ability to build tradition and a strong culture on the gridiron.

We don't think there should be a penalty for experiencing sustained success. After all, that is what we are all aspiring to do. According to the current plan, teams in the 9B and 11A divisions that accumulate 12 success points in a four-year span are automatically placed into the next largest division. We cannot speak on behalf of class A schools, and are not attempting to. However, in a small town, this could be problematic. Small towns often have fluctuating class sizes. If a small town has a "once in a generation class" that comes through and has a lot of success in their high school career, that does not mean the classes that follow them will have the same success.

A hypothetical example would be the 5th and 6th grade classes in Linton. These two grades have great numbers respective to our class sizes (10 boys in 6th and 12 Boys in 5th), and a lot of talented athletes in those grades. If our 5th grade class competes in the semi-finals as freshman, competes in the Dakota Bowl as sophomores and juniors, and wins the 9B State Championship their senior year, that would be an incredible run for Linton-HMB football! In the current plan, we would be forced to play in the 11B division the next two years. The problem is, the four classes following have a combined 18 total boys and we know we will not get every boy to play football. So not only would we be forced to play 11-man, we would have to do so after graduating the best numbers and some of the best athletes to come through this small town in a long time. Even with our co-op, we would likely struggle to have 22 athletes on our team. Obviously, having 22 kids or less on an 11-man roster is problematic and presents several challenges that would threaten the ability to sustain a quality football program.

We used our own district as an example only because we have thorough knowledge of our enrollment. However, it is likely that Lamoure, New Salem, Cavalier, and other successful football programs could potentially be in a very similar position. To our knowledge, there has only been a handful of programs that have accumulated 12 or more success points in the last 25 or more years. However, we still think this is an issue that needs to be addressed to avoid the problem of having a successful football program potentially struggle to even field a team because of lack of numbers. Especially, when you take into consideration that small towns are becoming smaller and smaller. The consistent enrollment numbers are not what they were in the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s.

Like we stated earlier, we cannot speak on behalf of class A teams. However, this could be a change that is only made in the B divisions if the board felt that the "forced opt ups" are a good thing in 11A and 11AA divisions. Thank you for your time and attention, and your willingness to serve North Dakota as an NDHSAA board member and Executive Director!

Respectfully,


Paul Keeney
Superintendent/AD


Tanner Purintun
Head Football Coach