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## **Football playoffs stick with 16 teams per class, adjust qualifying system**

BOONE, Iowa – At its monthly meeting on January 24, the Iowa High School Athletic Association's Board of Control approved changes to the sport's playoff qualifying system, and to allow out-of-state contests starting in the 2018 season. Classifications and a new two-year district format were also approved at Wednesday's meeting.

"Player safety is the number one priority," IHSAA executive director Alan Beste said, "and we are also committed to playing early round postseason games on Friday nights. Keeping 16 qualifiers per class allows for maximum recovery time between games and maintains high school's Friday night tradition." The number of regular season games and playoff teams per class will remain unchanged for 2018 and 2019. Recommendations from the Iowa Football Coaches Association and playoff football advisory committee were to expand the postseason field to 32 teams in Classes 3A, 2A, 1A, A, and 8-Player, and 24 teams in Class 4A after a nine-game regular season. However, the Board of Control unanimously opted to maintain the current schedule with nine regular season games and 16 postseason qualifiers per class, which will allow the season to end before a holiday break, and avoid further overlap with winter seasons. Teams will continue to have nine home games and nine away games over the two-year district cycle. The IHSAA's football playoffs featured 32 qualifiers per class from 2008 until 2015. It returned to its prior format of 16 postseason squads in its six classifications in 2016.

The Board of Control followed other provisional recommendations made in last month's advisory committee meeting in voting to distribute football districts and alter the 16-team qualifying structure.

### **District Breakdown**

Based on [classification changes made in October](#), the Board discussed and voted to approve football districts that will allow all classes to add non-district contests and reduce district travel.

Classification and district assignments will be finalized and released on Thursday, January 25.

The new format for 2018-19 is as follows...

**Class 4A:** 42 teams, 7 districts, 6 teams per district; 4 non-district games per team.

**Class 3A, 2A, 1A:** 54 teams, 9 districts, 6 teams per district; 4 non-district games per team.

**Class A:** 62 teams, 8 districts with 6 teams, and 2 districts with 7 teams; 4 non-district games per team in 6-team districts and 3 non-district games per team in 7-team districts.

**8-Player:** 65 teams, 7 districts with 8 teams and 1 district with 9 teams; 2 non-district games per team in 8-team districts and 1 non-district game per team in 9-team district (Week 0 possible).

### **Postseason Qualifying System**

A provisional recommendation approved by the Board changes how the 16 teams in each class will qualify for their playoffs starting in 2018.

The new format for 2018-19 is as follows...

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1. Only the district champion or teams tying for a district championship receive automatic qualification.
2. For the first time since the debut of district football, all nine games will count toward postseason qualification.
3. The 17-point district tiebreaker will be eliminated and not factor into qualification.
4. Remaining at-large qualifiers will be determined by a Ratings Percentage Index formula. The RPI will use three criteria to determine postseason qualification.
  - a. Team's overall win-loss percentage (accounting for 37.5% of the index)
  - b. Team's opponent's win-loss percentage (37.5%)
  - c. Team's opponent's opponent's win-loss percentage (25%)
5. Classification differences between non-district opponents do not affect RPI.

The NCAA uses RPI in several men's and women's sports. The Colorado High School Activities Association debuted a similar RPI system in 2016.

"Our goal is to have the best 16 teams in each class qualify for the playoffs," Beste said. "We believe we get closer to that goal by having only district champions as automatic qualifiers, and the remainder of qualifiers determined by their success and the success of their opponents and other successful teams."

### **Out-Of-State Competition**

The Board of Control approved an additional recommendation allowing varsity football teams to play games against nearby opponents in border states – Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wisconsin – and Kansas.

"We will protect Iowa teams first, ensuring they have games each week," Beste said. "However, we do have schools on our borders and other Iowa schools expressing interest in traveling for out-of-state competition. Accommodating those requests for competitive and geographical purposes is a reasonable thing to do." Iowa varsity squads last played out-of-state opponents in non-district games in 2011.

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**IHSAA PURPOSE:** To promote, develop, direct, protect, and regulate amateur interscholastic athletic relationships between member schools and to stimulate fair play, friendly rivalry, and good sportsmanship among contestants, schools, and communities throughout the state.

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