

Marian State Grid Playoff Possibility

By PETER TESTA

If you thought what happened to Marian when it forged a three-way share of the Illini-8 crown back in 1976, but was the only one of the trio not selected for the Class 4A playoffs, caused a furor (and if most assuredly did) it could be that you haven't seen anything yet.

Now that the Spartans have dramatically risen into contention for the top spot on the strength of critical back-to-back wins over Lockport and Joliet Central the past two weeks, (sharing the league lead this time around with the Porters and Joliet Catholic) the time has arrived once again to inspect the conference's process for choosing its post-season representative as Coach Dave Mattio's forces ready themselves for the final regular season home game Saturday when Romeoville comes to Chicago Heights.

Three years ago, a vote was conducted among I-8 coaches to settle the matter of playoff teams, and the Hilltoppers and the Steelmen were designated for the two available spots. Joliet Catholic vindicated itself by going on to capture what was its second straight state title; however, Joliet Central was knocked out of the tournament in the preliminary round.

THE FLAWS in that method were by then pretty apparent to all concerned, so that winter what should probably be termed the "Marian Rule" was written into the league by-laws. Shares of first place among both two and three squads are covered, dealing with every possible contingency in the two sets of deadlocks.

Ties between two schools are broken simply by awarding the berth to the winner of the game matching the co-champions.

The procedure for three teams is where the situation begins to become complicated. It wouldn't be too complex if the first tie-breaker could be invoked, handing the prize to the one squad which had defeated both of the other tri-winners, but since the Spartans first lost to Joliet Catholic, then turned around and blanked Lockport, which followed by dumping the Hilltoppers, that means is inconclusive.

Next in line comes a breakdown which is so detailed in nature that no standoff should remain entangled; the Illinois High School Association "At Large" point system.

IN THIS examination, each of the three survivors is awarded a

"regular" number of points for each of its nine games, depending upon a pair of factors: whether the team won or lost, and if its opponent finishes the year above, below or precisely at the .500 level. Another column which takes into account the classification of every foe is also tabulated.

At his point, Marian has beaten Bremen, a 4A school like the Spartans which now stands at 3-4. Eight points are penciled beside Marian for that contest. Six points were earned for the loss to a 403 Hillcrest aggregation.

The current total for the Spartans is thus 14 points, since only the two non-conference games played by each team can provide any variance because the seven I-8 encounters will only serve to cancel each other out.

Lockport lost to a club which has already clinched a winning year (Glenbard South), so the Porters will wind up with six points for that one. Right now, eight points are the result of Lockport's victory over Wheaton-Warrenville (currently a 3-4 team).

IRONICALLY, Joliet Catholic finds itself in the least comfortable position. Losses to both St. Laurence and Mt. Carmel are worth a total of just 12 points and no class points, while both Marian and Lockport gain two class points for their single non-league triumphs.

Had the campaign ended as of last week's play therefore, the Hilltoppers would bow out, and both the Spartans and the Porters would stand with 14 regular points and a pair of class points. How would the issue then be resolved? Here's what the conference by-laws state:

"In the event two teams are still tied in the "At Large" points, a flip of the coin will determine the playoff representative."

The fact that Marian downed Lockport head-to-head would not be considered, and although these point totals might change in the final two weeks, the possibility exists that they could stay exactly the same as well. So an off-the-field process might be the deciding factor yet another time.

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