

## Tinkering with the hoops tourney; get ready for wrestling Super Regionals

The middle of summer seems like an odd time to talk high school basketball, but there was some interesting discussion about the sport in Wisconsin last month.

What started as an online piece written in March by Wissports.net general manager Travis Wilson turned into a list of proposals that quickly progressed through WIAA pipelines before getting shot down by the WIAA's Advisory Council, made of school administrators from around the state, a day before the June 22 WIAA Board of Control meeting. That prevented them from being voted upon by the BOC.

Most interesting were proposed tweaks to the WIAA's post-season tournament.

One of the ideas floated by Wilson that gained traction was to adjust the dividing lines between the five divisions used in the boys and girls tournaments. Currently Division 1 consists of programs with enrollments above 1,200. Division 2 consists of programs with enrollments of 600 to 1,200. Division 5 features the smallest 128 programs, which creates a completely full bracket of four, 32-team sectionals, and the rest of the state's teams are split equally between Divisions 3 and 4. In 2022-23, there are 100 boys teams in D3 and D4 and 94 girls teams in each.

The proposed changes would've lowered the Division 1 threshold to 1,100 students, altered Division 2 to programs with enrollments between 550 and 1,099, created a 112-team Division 5 tournament and, again, split the rest evenly between Divisions 3 and 4.

Locally, this wouldn't change much for Gilman and Rib Lake, who aren't likely to ever move up from Division 5, but there would be some interest from Medford's point of view.

When you talk about doubling the enrollment from one of the spectrum to another within a division, going from 600 to 1,200 feels pretty drastic. It's one thing in Division 5 to have schools with enrollments of 70 playing schools with enrollments of 140. It's also one thing to have schools of 1,200 playing schools of 2,400 in Division 1. It's basketball. You only have five players on the court at one time. Once you get above enrollments of 1,000 or 1,100 in Wisconsin, it's big-city



### Matt's Bleacher Shots

Matt Frey

basketball, period.

When the five-division format went into place in the 2010-11 season, it was the Division 2 schools in Medford's size range that felt the school-size shift the most. They went from that solid middle of the pack to slightly on the high end range to suddenly being on the small end of the division. Like any grouping of teams, someone is going to be the biggest and someone is going to be the smallest. It's never fair. Truthfully, I'm not crazy about a 550 to 1,100 spread either. That almost seems like an even tougher doubling from one end to the other.

On one hand, it would seem more fair to narrow the 600-1,200 gap to 650-1,100 or even 700-1,100. But, I get it, if you went 700-1,000, you'd knock about 23 teams out of D2, using this year's enrollment figures, leaving only about 66 boys teams in the division. You can't do that. And that wouldn't get La Crosse Central (1,020) or Onalaska (953) out of the sectional.

Also I think having three state champions with enrollments under 600 in the current format is already too many. So it's hard to say what the right answer is.

Just as an added FYI, Medford's enrollment figure for 2022-23 shoots up to 705. For the first time I can remember, Medford is bigger than Antigo (703) but still smaller than Lakeland (749) and has pulled well ahead of Mosinee (643) and Ashland (615) who it used to be almost equal with.

The other proposal I liked that got shot down was adding two teams to the Division 1 state tournament field. That would have created a six-team field and two additional games on Thursday morning of the tournament, when no games have been played since the five-division format started. The top two Division 1 seeds would get a bye to Friday's semifinals.

The state tournament needs more bigger schools and more big-name players from those schools, both boys and girls, to add some pizzazz. About 20 years ago I probably wouldn't have said that. But

after 12 years of five divisions, there's no doubt the state tournament isn't the event it used to be and the attendance numbers prove it. Four Division 1 schools aren't enough.

\*\*\*

One change that did come from June's Board of Control meeting that will be good for its sport was a tournament tweak we'll see this winter in wrestling.

With significant drops in team roster sizes, WIAA regional tournaments, especially in Divisions 2 and 3 had gotten pretty watered down. Weight class brackets of two to four kids were getting to be common. With the top two wrestlers in each bracket advancing to the sectional, there were too many brackets in regional competition that had little suspense.

That should change this year with the creation of super regionals in Divisions 2 and 3. Previously, there were four regionals within each sectional. Each regional sent two wrestlers in each bracket to individual sectional competition and one team to team sectional competition. The super regional format basically combines two sets of regionals in each sectional and creating more meat to those regional brackets.

The same number of individuals (eight per weight class) and teams (four) will still go to each sectional meet. But now, the top four wrestlers in each weight class will advance from each super regional as will the top two teams. This looks like a good thing.

Medford has been pegged to host one of the Division 2 super regionals this winter on Saturday, Feb. 11. The Raiders will see much different competition on that first weekend of post-season wrestling. Instead of teams like the Neillsville Co-op, Regis-Altoona, Black River Falls and Stanley-Boyd that Medford had seen in recent years, the Medford Super Regional includes Amery, Antigo, Ashland, Barron, Chetek-Weyerhaeuser/Prairie Farm, the Luck Co-op, Northwestern, Osceola, Rice Lake, St. Croix Falls, Spooner-Webster and Tomahawk.

Cornell-Gilman-Lake Holcombe will be in the Edgar Super Regional in Division 3. That meet features the Wolfpack, Athens, Auburndale, Boyceville, Cadott, Durand, Edgar, Glenwood City, Mara-

thon, McDonell Central, Spring Valley-Elmwood, Stratford and Thorp/Owen-Withee.

\*\*\*

Fall and winter tournament assignments were posted some time ago by the WIAA. Other than the wrestling super regionals, local items of note include:

★ Medford's basketball teams are on opposite sides of the Division 2 sectional bracket. The girls remain in the eastern half with teams like Mosinee, Antigo, Rhinelander, Lakeland and Merrill, while the boys were moved back to the western half the WIAA has been trying to put Medford in the last handful of years. They will have to get through the La Crosse Central/Onalaska/Rice Lake/River Falls/ New Richmond gauntlet to reach this winter's sectional final. The boys got to the final last year by playing through the eastern side.

★ Rib Lake's and Gilman's girls basketball teams are separated in the Division 5 assignments with Gilman being in the northwest sectional and Rib Lake in the northeast. However, in boys play, the Pirates and Redmen are both in the northwest sectional. Not saying there's any advantage or disadvantage either way. Just pointing out the oddity.

★ Things get a little tougher for Medford's girls tennis team with Regis-McDonell, a new co-op, and Altoona being in the subsectional meet, which is in Altoona. Medford didn't see Regis last year until the sectional and Altoona was in a whole different sectional.

★ Sectional semifinalist Winneconne is no longer in Medford's Division 2 volleyball sectional.

★ The new Bloomer-Colfax gymnastics co-op is in the Antigo sectional.

★ Medford's cross country teams will have to go a bit further than Colby for sectional competition. Black River Falls gets this year's meet. Prentice-Rib Lake is back in Phillips for a second straight year.

★ If Medford is able to pull a boys swim team back together this winter, the Raiders will go all the way to Ashwaubenton for that sectional. A site is still being sought for the girls sectional meet in November.

*Matt Frey is the Sports Editor at The Star News.*

## Beaver Dam AD Melissa Gehring to join WIAA executive staff

The Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association announced the hiring of Melissa Gehring as an assistant director for the association on Tuesday. She will assume her role at the organization's headquarters on Aug. 1.

"I was fortunate to have benefitted from my participation in athletics during my formative years," Gehring said. "After spending the last decade working to provide similar experiences and opportunities for the students in Beaver Dam, I'm honored to have the privilege to continue that effort on a state-wide level."

Gehring's responsibilities will include the administration, coordination of duties and tournament planning for the sports assigned as well as other administrative duties.

"We are very excited for Melissa to join our staff," WIAA Executive Director Stephanie Hauser said. "With the addition of her experience, talent and passion for education-based athletics, we will continue to grow as a team and to improve in our efforts to provide the best possible service to our 516 member schools."

Gehring has served in the Beaver Dam School District since 2002. Most

recently, she has held the positions of associate principal and athletics/activities director since 2013. In those roles, she coordinated and managed the high school athletic programs and activities. Gehring was responsible for all events, facilities, extra-curricular safety, security, transportation and branding. In addition, she had oversight of the physical education, health and music departments.

During her nine years in those positions, she led the facility design, planning and implementation of a successful \$49 million referendum. She was also responsible for navigating an all-sport conference realignment process, development of a department mission statement, creating higher academic eligibility standards and accountability, and development of a Unified Sports program.

Upon joining the district in 2002, Gehring served as varsity volleyball coach,



Melissa Gehring

assistant softball coach and Unified Sports basketball coach until 2012. She also taught history, sociology, general psychology, advanced placement psychology and served as the social studies department chair in 2013, when she added the role of interim dean of students for one year.

Prior to her experiences at Beaver Dam, Gehring held a number of roles at UW-Eau Claire after she played on the Blugolds' women's volleyball team from 1999-2001 and on the women's basketball team in 1998-99. She worked as an office assistant in planning and preparations for events, volleyball camp counselor, student assistant women's basketball coach, freshmen orientation adviser and intramural official.

In addition to her work experiences, Gehring has held leadership committee positions at the statewide and national levels. She is a current member of the WIAA Sports Advisory Committee and the Conference Realignment Task Force. Gehring is also the District 6 representative and the former District 6 gender representative for the Wisconsin Athletic Directors Association, and she has coordinated the State Leadership Training

Institute program for the organization. Furthermore, she was an AD Insider presenter in 2020.

Gehring's athletic administration involvement at the national level includes serving as the Wisconsin representative on the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association Professional Development Academy as well as a member of the 2021 U Executive Leadership Cohort program.

Among the honors she has been bestowed is being named the WADA District 6 Athletic Director of the Year in 2021 and being credited with Beaver Dam High School earning the WIAA Award of Excellence three times.

Gehring earned a Bachelor of Science degree in history and political science education from UW-Eau Claire in 2002. She received a master's degree in Teaching and Learning from Carroll University in 2008, and obtained an Educational Leadership Certification from Concordia University-Mequon in 2014.

Originally from Eau Claire, Gehring resides in Beaver Dam and is married to her husband, Bill. They have five children, Maddie, Ian, Donovan, and twins Bella and Elsa.