

December 8, 2015

NDHSAA Board of Directors,

I am writing this letter as a parent of an 8th grade male athlete from Devils Lake that competes in football. I have a concern about the current structure of football divisions within the North Dakota High School Activities Association. I believe there is a significant disparity in the alignment of schools within the current four division system. I respectfully ask the board to reconsider the current alignment of football divisions and request that Devils Lake be moved to the "AA" division to promote a more equal and safer level of competition for our student athletes.

Devils Lake enrollment of male athletes in grades 7-10 is 209, according the North Dakota High School Activities Association website (<http://www.ndhsaa.com/athletics/football>). The next higher enrollment of male athletes in this age group is in Jamestown with 333 athletes, which is 124 more athletes than Devils Lake. The average enrollment of male athletes in grades 7-10 in the top 12 teams in ND High School football is 550, which is 341 more athletes than Devils Lake.

My main point in writing this letter is that the competitive advantage of the top 12 schools in the "AAA" division, over schools like Devils Lake and Jamestown that compete in the same division, is not even comparable. The reality is that Schools such as Devils Lake and Jamestown will never match up equally with schools that have two or even three times the student enrollment. The negative impact of this fact, is that many potential athletes who are eligible to play football, choose not to play because the odds are stacked so greatly against them from the start. This point is about fairness for those schools that don't have a legitimate opportunity to compete on an equal basis.

My other point leads to safety of student athletes. It goes without saying that those schools with larger student athlete populations have bigger and stronger athletes to line up on the football field. When opposing teams are significantly different in terms of size and strength, there is an increased probability of injury to athletes. This has been the case for many Devils Lake athletes since moving to the "AAA" division. Of those athletes that do compete in football, many have been injured by playing against athletes considerably bigger and stronger than they are. In a time when football is already under significant scrutiny due to safety concerns of our athletes, I respectfully request a realignment of schools and divisions where our athletes can compete without overwhelming odds against them.

I understand there is not always a perfect division of teams, but I am certain there is a fairer alignment than we currently have. I suggest a 6 team east and west region at both the "AAA" and "AA" divisions like we currently have at the "A" division. This will reduce the average differentiation of student athlete populations within each division. If there are additional teams that desire to compete in an 11 man division the board could add an additional region at the "A" level for example.

I recognize that there may be issues with any realignment of our current football divisions, but if we want to keep football as a viable option for all student athletes, we need to protect our athletes on the field and provide them with a fair opportunity to compete. For the safety of student athletes and the promotion of fair competition, I am asking the board to reconsider the alignment of schools within the current football divisions and move Devils Lake to the "AA" division. Thank you for your consideration of my letter.



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