

Mr. Phil Gardner
pgardner@ihsaa.org

January 11, 2010

Dear Mr. Gardner,

I'm writing to ask you to consider making long needed and necessary changes in cross country so the sport is more equitable for smaller schools and especially student athletes who run for those schools. I've been blessed with coaching opportunities at a large 5A school, 21 years at Carmel Track and Field, and a small 3A school, 19 years at Brebeuf Jesuit Cross Country. These coaching opportunities enable me to speak to the clear and present discrepancies between the large and small school cross country programs in Indiana.

Using the football classifications, large 5A schools have dominated the IHSAA state meet for the past 45 years. State meet champions have come from 5A programs 95% of the time with the other 2 state champs coming from large 4A programs. You'd have to go back to 1964 and West Lafayette to find a small 3A school state champion. Needless to say the top ten team finishers at state over the past 45 years have also been predominantly from 5A and 4A programs to an even higher percentage than the state champ numbers. I believe, as do the majority of small school cross country coaches believe, it's time for our IHSAA leadership to make a change and go to a 3 class system like so many of our neighbors and most every state high school association with cross country in the United States. Here is a sampling of surrounding states and class cross country.

Illinois - 3 classes	Wisconsin - 3 classes	West Virginia - 3 classes
Ohio - 3 classes	Pennsylvania - 2 classes	Ontario - 2 classes
Kentucky - 3 classes	Montana - 4 classes	Maryland - 4 classes
Michigan - 4 classes	New Jersey - 6 classes	Virginia - 3 classes
Iowa - 4 classes	Tennessee - 4 classes	Arkansas - 6 classes
Missouri - 4 classes	Minnesota - 2 classes	Louisiana - 7 classes

This change would benefit ALL three classes allowing the best of the best to compete in the state finals which is not the case now. More deserving student athletes would have the opportunities that are now given to the 5A powerhouse teams that dominate certain sectional, regional, and semi-state competitions leaving the small school programs and runners who have been unfairly placed in those sectional, regional, and semi-state sites. A fresh look and new approach will benefit all student athletes.

Cross Country is and should be considered a TEAM sport simply because you need 5 runners to count toward your TEAM score. Just like basketball, the team relies on those 5. The highlight at the state cross country meet is recognizing the top 5 TEAMS and all 12 runners from the team's sectional entry roster, just like basketball recognizes the 12 team members at the basketball state finals.

Looking at the times at the Brebeuf regional and feeding into the Carmel semi-state there are many deserving individuals who don't make it to state and then don't get the recognition from *college programs* because they are not at the state meet. A perfect example is Jason Hoard from Brebeuf.

Jason advances through the Brebeuf sectional (**only 3A runner to advance**), he also advances through the Brebeuf regional to the semi-state (**again, only 3A runner to advance**), and he has an off Carmel semi-state meet and finishes outside the top 15 individuals. The top 15 individuals are dominated by **#1 Columbus North, #3 Carmel, and #4 North Central, and #6 Noblesville** and other top ranked team runners. As a result Jason doesn't make the state meet. The top 11 teams at the Carmel semi-state are **ALL 5A programs. Look at the 6 advancing Carmel semi-state teams and you'll find each team in the TOP 8 at state.** *Jason beat several top 25 runners* from this year's state meet throughout the season and would have easily finished in the top 10 in every other semi-state even with his off race but is denied a place at state because he's from a small school and is competing against the top 5A powerhouse teams and runners. He is then denied the attention from college coaches because he didn't make the state finals. Jason is one of many that didn't get the recognition they deserved. Another regional runner, James Ricker from Cathedral had an incredible season finishing among the best in all big races but didn't make it out of the Brebeuf regional. Molly Winters was 21st in the state meet last season but finished out of the top 15 at the Brebeuf regional where 14 of 15 runners were from 5A programs and 9 of those runners from **#1 Carmel or #3 Noblesville.** In the Ben Davis regional which was dominated by 7 5A schools and 1 4A school, the top 2A finisher, Cascades#1 runner Levi Musson, finishes 19th and doesn't advance. In the Brown County regional, Bloomfield has a top runner Julie Riggins, who finishes 19th and does not advance. All top ten female finishers in this regional came from 5A schools.

Please consider some additional data from the 2009 cross country season. This points out how unfair the current IHSAA placement of large 5A schools at Regional meets throughout the state. This is also true at many sectional sites and the Carmel semi-state.

Brebeuf Regional	8 - 5A schools, <i>all 8 ranked schools</i> -	all 5 in the top 8 at state
Ben Davis Regional	7 - 5A schools -	0 in top 10 at state
Brown County Regional	5 - 5A schools -	1 in the top 10 at state
Elkhart Central Regional	4 - 5A schools -	0 in the top 10 at state
New Prairie Regional	4 - 5A schools -	1 in the top 10 at state
Crown Point Regional	4 - 5A schools -	0 in the top 10 at state
West Noble Regional	4 - 5A schools -	0 in the top 10 at state
Greensburg Regional	3 - 5A schools -	1 top 10 #1 Columbus North
Marion Regional	2 - 5A schools -	1 in the top 10 at state
Rushville Regional	2 - 5A schools -	0 in the top 10 at state
Bedford N. Lawrence Regional	2 - 5A schools -	0 in the top 10 at state
Crawford County Regional	2 - 5A schools -	1 in the top 10 at state
Harrison (West Laf.) Regional	2 - 5A schools -	0 in the top 10 at state
Culver Regional =	1 - 5A school -	0 in the top 10 at state
Pike Central Regional =	1 - 5A school -	0 in the top 10 at state
Delta Regional =	0 - 5A schools -	0 in the top 10 at state

All ten 5A schools finished in the top 10 at state.

How about having your child from a small school running in a regional dominated by 4A/5A schools? The margin of error is so small, that these small school runners are at a significant disadvantage in terms of their chances of being noticed or recognized. To get such a chance you'd have to beat the state's best out of the large school. Because the Brebeuf Regional and Carmel Semi-State are loaded with strong 5A powerhouse teams and the IHSAA only takes 15 individuals

(those individuals are predominantly from the top 5A teams in the state) the strong small school runner and small school team has little chance of advancing and their season is over. These runners are increasingly looking toward opportunities such as the Nike Cross Nationals and the Foot Locker Championship for exposure that is not being provided by their Indiana state association.

Mr. Gardner, I understand that you've inherited much of this problem but never-the-less the current setup is a disservice to Indiana small school teams and Indiana runners. Please consider this information and allow a small group of central Indiana coaches an opportunity to propose a fair and equitable solution with benefitting ALL cross country student athletes as the main focus.

Sincerely,

Karl T. Knerr
Brebeuf Jesuit Cross Country
Clay Middle School
Social Studies Department Chair
6th Grade Humanities Teacher
Carmel, Indiana
kknerr@ccs.k12.in.us
317-727-0364