

IHSAA still hasn't fixed class sports nearly 25 years later

I'm going to wake you up with a stat today you won't believe.

Do you realize that student athletes in Indiana just graduating from college never knew a world without class sports?

We are almost at a time when we will have had class sports in Indiana for a quarter of a century.

And you know what? The IHSAA still hasn't got it right.

You see, we really don't have class sports in Indiana. We have select class sports in Indiana. In fact, only 40 percent of our sports are class. The other 60 percent have never changed.

Think about this. You have never been to a boys class tourney in cross country, golf, swimming, tennis, track, or wrestling.

Likewise, girls in Indiana have never seen a class tourney in cross country, golf, gymnastics, swimming, tennis, or track.

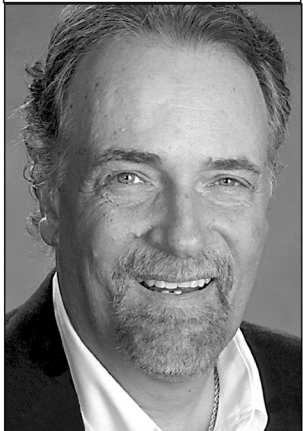
And it gets better. The only other state in our country that has select class sports is the frozen world of Alaska.

I brought this problem up to our new commis-



SPORTS TALK

Jim Brunner



sioner, Paul Neidig, last week, and he claimed he had no idea that only two states in the USA had select class sports.

So why is it that way? It's easy to look back nearly a quarter of a century ago and remember why.

The small schools in Indiana were tired of losing every year to the big, bad, large schools in hoops, so they went to the IHSAA

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and said we need class. It finally happened, but we went class in only eight team sports because they felt anyone could still win an individual title in sports like golf and track.

So think of this. You play football and basketball and your team gets to play against schools their own size. But then here comes spring, and now you compete with schools like Carroll and Homestead with thousands of students.

After talking to the new commish who I thought would at least listen to my plea, I guess we are in for another quarter of a century of select class sports.

The IHSAA says its been a rough calendar year for them.

I say it's been a rough quarter of a century.



Panthers posing with their sectional championship trophy this past February.

Panthers looking to build off sectional championship season

By Sean Douglas

Last winter, Eastbrook was a team characterized by grit, toughness, and defensive acumen.

Despite a myriad of issues on offense, the Panthers bought into defense midway through last season, and it paid off down the stretch, helping them collect their first sectional title in four years.

With a standout core returning, together with an exciting group of incoming freshmen, the Panthers will be looking to pick up right where they left off a season ago.

"Defensively, the girls figured it out," Eastbrook Head Coach Jeff Liddick said. "But my hope is that we keep that defensive mindset, [while] adding a little bit of skill with our returning players and some of our younger players."

Eastbrook's defensive play kept them in just about every game last season, but heading into the 2020-2021 campaign, Liddick knows that the offensive production must improve significantly.

In the summer workouts they were able to have, the Panthers worked tirelessly to rediscover their waning offensive touch. They spent time on ball-handling drills and began to incorporate transition offense.

Despite limited time together in the summer months, the Panthers made significant improvement.

With practices in full swing, Eastbrook has found their groove, spending 45 minutes on development each day followed by 45 minutes of scrimmaging to implement all the targeted skill sets. Some days, the Panthers flourish, while on others, they have their share of struggles. However, Liddick is encouraged by the progression.

"We are coming in every day and hitting those fundamental skills," Liddick said. "They come in everyday knowing that we are going to be hard on them and we are going to demand a lot. We are definitely seeing some progress, and we are definitely seeing some improvement."

While losing key players like Shauna Singer and Bri Stepp, the Panthers return a multitude of talented players at nearly every position.

Johwen McKim (11.8 ppg, 2.3 apg, 2.5 spg), Eastbrook's leading scorer, showed constant improvement at the point guard throughout last season and will be back running the offense.

Lexi Binkerd (4.5 ppg, 3.5 rbg), an ever-improving post player, looks to take her game to the next level underneath the bas-

ket.

Rachel Manning (4.4 ppg, 2.8 rpg), really improved as a defender last year, and will be one of the Panthers' best in the coming campaign.

And Kristin Goff (4.0 ppg, 3.5 rpg) who started last season splitting time between JV and varsity, shined in the postseason, becoming one of the Panthers' top offensive options.

With those four leading the way, the Panthers are in good hands from both a skill level and leadership perspective.

"What I see out of them every day is a high level of energy, enthusiasm, intensity, and leadership," Liddick said. "I think all four of those girls have improved in different areas of their game that is going to make [each] of them a more versatile player."

Gabby Scott and Lily McLaughlin will also play more prominent roles this season.

Scott, after running the point on the JV team the last three seasons, is a stout player in multiple areas, and Liddick believes that she will be a key figure in Eastbrook's rotation this winter.

"Gabby has worked extremely hard on her shot," Liddick said. "Now, she can [do] what she's good at, and that's spotting up on the perimeter, making good passes, and playing good defense. She is going to help us quite a bit this year."

Lily McLaughlin, one of Eastbrook's tallest girls at 5-9, dedicated herself to putting on more muscle, and she succeeded, adding 23 pounds over the course of the offseason.

"She still gets up and down the court as well as she did before," Liddick said. "She's going to have to do some big things for us."

Together with Eastbrook's veteran group, three freshmen will look to create roles for themselves on the Panthers this coming season.

Sophia Morrison, who has played a lot of basketball at the AAU level, sees the floor well. She's an excellent passer, a great ball-handler, and a good spot-up shooter with the ability to finish around the basket.

Olivia Howell and Kortney Goff are similar in style. They are both intense, and they both get after it on the defensive end of the floor, diving for loose balls and hustling up and down the court.

All three have vast potential, but in order to make an impact, Liddick knows they are going to need the experience that only



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