

Bulldogs try new classification concepts

By ERIC SINGER
Staff Writer

HERMISTON — Hermiston Athletic Director Larry Usher made the trip to the OSAA offices in Wilsonville on Jan. 30 for the reclassification committee meeting, hoping to explain Hermiston's problems as a large district in rural Oregon.

However, Usher said he departed the meeting feeling as if his testimony "fell on deaf ears."

From the three prior meetings, Hermiston was drawn into the top classification in both a 6-class and 5-class models, playing in a league with seven or eight other teams in the Portland area. By attending, Usher's goal was to give testimony to the committee on what Hermiston feels is the best move for its student athletes, and to jump-start some conversation to help find a better fit for Hermiston in the reclassification models.

None of what he suggested made it into the current options put forth by the OSAA.

The three proposals — 6-class, 5-class, and football-only models — were slightly updated at the meeting, with the only significant changes being adding a second option in the top classifications.



FILE PHOTO

A 400-pound bronze bulldog statue stands guard just inside the gates of the Kennison Field Complex at Hermiston High School.

Option one is status quo from the previous proposals, with Hermiston remaining in a nine-team Mt. Hood Conference in the 6A/5A levels.

However, the second option featured the changes, with Hermiston moving to a newly-created Inter County Conference with central Oregon schools Bend, Summit and Mountain View, along with Portland-area schools Gresham and Barlow in

the 6A model and Sandy and Reynolds in the 5A model.

Usher said that while he acknowledges the OSAA for looking at other setups, the new options were a big head-scratcher for him and other school officials from around the state.

"To be honest, after communicating with other athletic directors around the state, we all got a good laugh out of it," he said.

"Our big issue is in no world is anyone at the 6A level going make Barlow and Gresham go to Bend for league games. And then what rationale are you using to pick those two schools, because when you go to 5A proposal now you have Sandy and Reynolds? Why not Clackamas, Oregon City? It's just confusing."

OSAA Executive Director Peter Weber said Hermiston does present

some major challenges for the reclassification committee, but it is only one of many issues they have to take care of.

"We listened to over four-and-a-half hours of testimony at our last meeting," he said, "and we're trying to work the wants, desires, and needs of our 290 member schools. This was our fourth public meeting, which means were about halfway through the process now and the proposals that are out there are not by any means final yet, so a lot can still happen."

While giving his testimony, Usher offered two suggestions to the committee that he and the Hermiston officials supported.

The first, Usher said, was proposing the OSAA raising the 6A enrollment cutoff from the current mark of 1,330 to 1,390, which would keep Hermiston in the second-higher classification and in a league with Pendleton, Redmond, Ridgeview, The Dalles, Hood River, and Crook County. However, it was shot down by the committee.

The second suggestion Usher offered was for the OSAA to award Hermiston with a geographic exception, allowing the school

to stand pat the way they are currently in all sports outside of football, where they would have no objection to being in the 6A Mt. Hood Conference.

The geographical waiver is also what has allowed Summit and Bend to remain in Class 5A over the current classification time block, even though their enrollments were above the 6A threshold.

Weber said that at this point in the process, the committee views the geographic exception as a last-resort action.

"Our goal is to try and take care of member schools without a geographic exception," he said, "and our job is to find a balance. It doesn't mean it is off the table, but at this point it's not a priority."

Hermiston is still exploring an opportunity to leave the OSAA and join the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA) to play in a league with schools from the Tri-Cities and Walla Walla, having already made a presentation to the WIAA executive committee last month.

The next OSAA reclassification committee meeting is set for Feb. 27 at the OSAA offices in Wilsonville.

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