

THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CLASS STRUCTURES
IN MONTANA BASKETBALL DEVELOPING INTO
THE BIG 32 CONFERENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

The problem of this study was to determine whether the present class structure of the Big 32 Conference could be improved to eliminate current dissatisfaction.

The subjects were all of the coaches and some of the administrators of all schools in the Big 32 Conference. Each was interviewed and asked his opinion of the present Big 32 Conference. An analysis of this information was compiled.

It was concluded that, in the opinion of the coaches, the basic plan of the Big 32 Conference was sufficient. There were, however, some changes that could be made that would strengthen this plan. From the results of these interviews, it was found that coaches supported three major proposals.

It was recommended by a majority of the coaches that one of these proposals, concerning the reorganization of the conference on a divisional basis, be adopted. It promises to solve many of the flaws in the present Big 32 Conference.

CHAPTER I

Nature of the Problem

The growth of schools and distances involved between schools has brought about many changes of the class structures in the history of Montana basketball. As the enrollment increased in some schools inequalities developed. It became difficult for the schools of small enrollments to compete with the more populous schools. This necessitated the placing of schools in different leagues or class structures. As the enrollments continued to increase in some of the schools of the state, more class structures developed. A class structure or plan was set up, and after a few years it became obsolete, and new structures were needed. The largest schools of the state were grouped in a structure referred to as Class A and later AA. These schools ranged in enrollment from about four hundred to 2400. As time passed a new plan was needed for the next largest schools or the Class B schools which had enrollments from about 175 to four hundred students. A few years later the smallest schools in the state, with enrollments of under two hundred students, were classified as Class C schools.

The different class structures were developed to place schools in classes of similar size. The large schools have changed class structures more times than the small schools,

Since the small ones have been more satisfied with their class structures, and seem to be so at the present time, this investigation will deal primarily with the structural problems of the larger schools.

The Big 32 Conference, organized in 1963, consisted of the thirty-two largest schools in the state of Montana. These schools were also referred to as Class A schools. A great deal of unrest and dissatisfaction has developed since the origin of the conference. Some schools felt that there was not enough importance placed on seasonal play. Other schools felt that the schedule of games assigned to them, failed to include schools that were located close to them. In addition, several of the largest schools in the conference were reluctant to play smaller schools. Prior to the organization of this conference the ten largest schools had been placed in a class by themselves and the idea of playing some of these new schools did not appeal to them. These dissatisfactions that have developed from the Big 32 Conference brought about this study.

The purpose of this investigation was to determine whether the coaches of the Big 32 Conference considered the present plan the best suited to the needs of the large schools of Montana. If this plan was considered to be insufficient by those interviewed, the material gained from their comments was to be used in the development of a new, more satisfactory plan.

A review of background information pertinent to the question of the history and development of the different class structures and of the present Big 32 Conference is presented in Chapter II.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY AND GROWTH OF BASKETBALL

Basketball was not accidentally invented but was deliberately thought out by Dr. James Naismith in 1891 at Springfield, Massachusetts. He was prompted to do so to meet an alarming situation of loss of interest in physical education programs during the winter months. The young men attending physical education classes, at that time, showed lack of interest in these periods when they had gathered to relax and have a good time. The American boy seemed to prefer free expression in his physical activity through recreational games which were usually competitive. In trying to find a game that would keep up interest, Dr. Naismith hit upon the idea of putting up peach baskets at each end of the gym. They chose sides, added a few rules, and used a soccer ball; the first game of basketball was underway.

The first game had nine men on each team. The ball could be batted or thrown in any direction, but a player could not run with the ball. The game consisted of two fifteen minute halves, with a five minute rest interval in between. These were some of the first rules of the game. Since that time there have been many changes in the development of the game to what it is today. In the game of basketball there are now, for example, over 250 statements which comprise the

modern rule book.

From the beginning of the game one of the greatest drawbacks has been the fact that there has not been one set of rules by which the game was played. In addition the gymnasiums were of different shapes and sizes which also added to the disorganization. One of the oddities that ensued was that the larger the gym, the more players they would have on a team.

Basketball, in its beginning, was considered little more than a winter recreation. Its original purpose was to provide indoor activity during the winter months. Shortly thereafter, minor competition developed, but basketball, however, did not become a major competitive sport until after World War I. At this time schools started building gymnasiums that would accommodate the game of basketball, and the gymnasiums were also built with seats so that spectators could watch the game.

The techniques of basketball did not develop too much until the mid 1930's. A premium was placed on defense, and there was not the variation of offense that the game has today. The character of basketball was distinct in each region of the country and there was, unfortunately, little interchange of ideas among the various sections. In the late 1930's there were numerous technical advancements. In addition the teams increased the number of intersectional games.

The rules also developed to enable the players to become more skillful. As a result, new styles and advanced methods of play became more prevalent. During this period basketball was given its greatest impetus as a spectator sport and competitive activity.

Basketball owes its growth to a number of factors. Perhaps the most significant reason why more people have begun to play the game and watch the game played is that they get more enjoyment and fun out of it than they do out of any other game. "It has been estimated that within the last few years approximately 80,000,000 people have paid admissions each year to watch the game of basketball. There are well over 100,000 teams good enough to play before audiences."(1)*

Basketball has outgrown all other sports in the high schools throughout the country. The smaller schools have taken basketball "to heart" and have adopted it as their major competitive sport. It is one of the few sports where the small school can compete with the larger school on a more or less equal basis. Another reason for its growth is because of the expense involved. It costs very little to outfit a basketball team in comparison to costs in football and baseball.

*Numbers in parenthesis refer to alphabetized references in the literature consulted.

Basketball has a great deal to offer in the way of a vigorous, indoor game. It is a game where the player may display speed, endurance, aggressiveness, stamina and all the other characteristics that bring out the ability and desire to compete.

The outlook for basketball is indeed bright. All indications are that this game will continue to grow tremendously. Most schools now have adequate gymnasiums, overcoming one of the previous problems confronting the teams in the past. New schools are being built which usually include adequate gymnasiums with a regulation basketball court and a large seating capacity. The regulation court has tended to equalize the competition of the participating teams.

Basketball is the world's largest spectator sport, and it has more participants than any other athletic game. (2) . It maintains interests at every level. It is played in gymnasiums, on hoops on the family tree, or on the garage. Basketball is known all over the world and is the top recreational sport of them all.

The next topic in this chapter deals with the history and development of basketball in Montana. Many schools started playing basketball as a competitive interscholastic sport and thereby a need developed to set up different structures enabling the schools to play in an organized state system.

The Early Development Period in Montana

Montana's long winters created a need for an indoor activity in our schools; thus, basketball developed very rapidly in this state as it did in the rest of the United States. Basketball has provided an activity not only for participants but for spectators as well. It also provides activities for other school groups. It gives school clubs a chance to participate in their activities at the games. The band has an opportunity to play before the game, at certain times during the game, and at half-time. Twirlers, gymnasts, tumblers, and marching groups have a chance to demonstrate their abilities at intermission. Many service clubs such as, the ushers, concession groups and finance clubs are active at basketball games. The cheerleaders, Pep club members and spectators have certainly taken an active part in the game of basketball with their enthusiasm and spirit. Basketball, then, is for the entire school and not just for boys who are participating on the basketball court.

Montana's first interscholastic basketball tournament, which was played in Bozeman in 1911, was organized by Montana State College. (3) From this time until 1932 Montana State College directed and supervised the state basketball program. They also had direct charge of all state tournaments that were held during that period of time. In 1933, however, the

Montana High School Association became the supervising body of athletics in the state. (4)

It was difficult for the small schools to compete with the large schools so a new division was created in 1932, which placed the largest sixteen schools in one league. This was the beginning of different class structures in Montana basketball.

Two Class Structures in Montana Between 1932-1949

In 1932 there were 180 Montana high schools playing interscholastic basketball, the group was divided into two divisions. Sixteen schools with the largest enrollments were placed in the "A" division. These schools, listed according to size of enrollment, were Great Falls, Butte City, Billings, Missoula County, Helena, Fergus County, Flathead County, Custer County, Gallatin County, Butte Central, Park County, Havre, Anaconda, Dawson County, Glasgow and Roundup. In case of withdrawal of one or more of the above schools, provision was made that the school or schools with the next highest enrollment as of October 1, 1932; Beaverhead County, Carbon County, Sidney, Deer Lodge and Whitefish would have been invited to participate in the Class A Tournament. The latter five schools were assigned to play in Division B districts, unless needed in the Class "A" Tournament. (5)

Division B, which consisted of the other 164 schools participating in Montana interscholastic basketball, were divided into sixteen districts. The winner of each of the districts advanced to the state tournament to play for the State Class B title. The winner of the Class A tournament played the winner of the Class B tournament for the state title. (6)

In 1933 the sixteen teams in Class A were divided into a northern division and a southern division. The first place winners of each advanced to the state tournament. The tournament consisted of two Class A teams playing the winners of the two Class B tournaments for the state title. The southern divisional winners of Class A and B would advance to a state tournament to meet the northern divisional winners of Class A and B. This year the state tournament was a four team round robin tournament, which took three days to play. The final winner was declared state champion.

District and divisional play was organized in 1935, much the same as it was in 1933 and 1934. In the final four team round robin state tournament, however, two state champions were declared, one in A and the other in B. Up to this time they had recognized only one state title. (7)

The two divisions system, northern and southern, in A and B with the four team round robin state championship lasted until 1942. The Class B teams were divided into two divisions in the north and two divisions in the south. The

final State Championship Tournament was composed of four Class A and four Class B teams. The four Class A teams were the first and second place winners from the northern and southern divisional tournaments. The four Class B teams were the winners of each of the four Class B divisional tournaments. This tournament determined the all-state Class A champion, an all-state Class B champion and an all-state consolation champion, as well as the all around all-state championship team. This team was the winner of a play-off game between the State A champion and the State B champion.(8)

There were no divisional or state tournaments held in 1943 due to World War II. In 1944 the sixteen largest schools were divided into four divisions. (9) The winners of these divisional tournaments would advance with the winners of the four Class B divisionals to a state championship tournament. The four Class A schools would play in their own bracket as would the four Class B teams. The winner of the Class A bracket would meet the winner of the Class B bracket to determine an all-state champion.

The organizational plan was the same in 1945, except that in the final tournament the Class A and B teams were matched against each other from the start. The same was true for 1946. In 1947, another change occurred. The top four teams in each division advanced to the state tournament. The State Class A tournament was played separately from the Class

B tournament, the latter consisting of the top two teams from each of their four divisions. (10) The same tournament schedules were used in 1948 and 1949.

Three Class Structures in Montana Between 1950-1955

A vast change was made in the basketball structure for the smaller schools in the school year 1949-50. The 141 smallest schools were divided into sixteen Class C districts, each having a district tournament. The top two winners of each district advanced to one of four divisional tournaments, and the top two teams from each of these advanced to an eight team state tournament. The winner of this tournament was then declared the Class C state champion. (11)

The thirty-two Class B schools continued their four divisional set up. The top two teams from each of the four divisional tournaments advanced to an eight team state tournament, the winner of which was declared the Class B State champion. As Class C schools gained in enrollment, they were added to Class B. In 1953, six schools were changed to the higher class. (12) The structure, however, did not change. In 1954, the western division in Class B was divided into two sub districts (13), each of which held their own tournament, and the first place team from each play-off advanced to the state tournament.

In 1955, Class B had grown to forty-five schools which were divided into six divisions. The winner of each was advanced to the state tournament. The other two positions were filled by the second place team from two of the six divisions. (14)

This method of selecting the two second place teams which would advance to the state tournament was set up on a rotation basis. Each year the divisions rotated so that two different second place teams from two different divisions advanced to the tournament.

Four Class Structure in Montana Between 1956-63

In the school year 1955-56, there was another major change made in the basketball structure for the large schools in Montana. (15) The ten largest schools, Anaconda, Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Butte Central, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell, Livingston and Missoula were placed in a conference called Class AA. The next ten largest schools, Billings Central, Glasgow, Glendive, Great Falls Central, Hardin, Havre, Laurel, Lewistown, Miles City and Sidney were placed in Class A. These two groups of schools played each other in their own conference on a home and home basis. They each had their own tournament. The first four placed in AA and A then advanced to a state tournament to decide the state championship.

The year 1956 saw another change for the large schools in their basketball structure. (16) The Class AA schools had their own state champion. The same was true for Class A. Each class held one tournament at the end of the season, independent of each other in order to determine their Class AA or A state champion. This same structure continued through 1961.

In 1962 Billings West was added to Class AA, and Bozeman and Livingston were dropped to Class A. (17) This left nine schools in Class AA, and Class A now had a total of twelve schools. The Class AA continued their one tournament at the end of conference play to determine the Class AA state champion. On the other hand, the Class A was divided into two six team divisions, western and eastern. The top four teams from each divisional tournament then advanced to the Class A state tournament.

The Class AA remained the same as in 1963, and Class A was again divided into two divisions. (18) Each team from Class A played an eighteen game conference schedule. The top four teams in conference play were automatically seeded in the Class A state tournament. The bottom eight teams played a "sudden death" game to determine the other four teams qualifying for the Class A state tournament. This brings the history and investigation of the basketball structure in the state of Montana up to 1964, at which time the Big 32 Conference had its origin.

Present Day Class C, Class B and Class A Basketball

The basketball structure in 1963-64 was reverted to three major classes. (19) Class C, composed of the smallest schools in Montana and ranging in enrollment from twenty-five to two hundred, were comprised of 119 schools. These schools, divided into fifteen districts, were allowed to play a maximum of twenty games before district tournaments. The first and second place team from each district tournament advanced to one of the four divisional tournaments. In order to have an eight team divisional tournament in the western division, however, the three top teams from District thirteen and fourteen advanced to this tournament, and the top two teams from District fifteen advanced, making a total of eight teams. The three districts-thirteen, fourteen and fifteen-alternated each year in sending three teams and two teams.

The first and second place winners of each of the four Class C divisional tournaments advanced to the Class C state tournament. The winner of the eight team tournament was then declared the Class C state champion.

There were thirty-nine schools in Class B ranging in enrollment from approximately 150 to four hundred. They were allowed to play a maximum of twenty games before the divisional tournaments, of which there were four.

The northern division of Class B schools had fifteen teams. Each year it sent its first three teams to the eight

teams. Each year it sent its first three teams to the eight team state tournament. The other three divisions would send one or two teams from their division on a rotation basis. These eight teams then played a Class B state tournament to determine its champion. (20)

The thirty-two Class A schools in Montana were placed in the "Big 32 Conference", which was inaugurated for the school year 1963-64. In enrollment these schools ranged between four hundred to 2400 students. (21) Initially, in 1963, there were only thirty schools enrolled in this conference. Two other new schools, Missoula Hellgate and Great Falls Russell, were added upon their completion, in 1964 and 1965, respectively. (22) The present thirty-two schools involved in the Big 32 are listed alphabetically as follows:

Anaconda	Columbia Falls
Anaconda Central	Deer Lodge
Billings Central	Dillon
Billings Senior	Glasgow
Billings West	Glendive
Butte Central	Great Falls Central
Butte Public	Great Falls Russell
Bozeman	Great Falls Public

Hamilton	Libby
Hardin	Livingston
Havre	Miles City
Helena Central	Missoula Hellgate
Helena Senior	Missoula Sentinel
Kalispell	Sidney
Laurel	Whitefish
Lewistown	Wolf Point

In the previous AA and A structures, prior to 1963, some schools complained about the classification and arrangement of schools. The AA consisted of one league with ten teams. During the season they played each other on a home and home basis. As a result some schools felt that, since they played each other twice during the year, the conference champion should not have to defend the title again in a tournament.* The Class A, on the other hand, had two divisions of six teams. The top four in each division advanced to play in a Class A state tournament.

In the new "Big 32", schools were required to play a minimum of fourteen conference games; however, in 1964 the minimum number of conference games required was raised to sixteen. (23) These contests were scheduled by a committee which is set up to schedule games for the teams in the conference. If a school

*Stated by H. P. Lund in an interview with the investigator at Bozeman, Montana, on May 27, 1966.

refused to play one of these games, they were charged with a loss by reason of a forfeit, and the other school was credited with a win. In addition, if a team did not play sixteen conference games, it was ranked and seeded in last place for divisional tournament play. (24)

Each team was seeded in their respective division, according to the percentage of the number of games they had won during conference play. The team in each division, that had the highest percentage of wins was seeded first. This method of evaluation was repeated until all eight teams were seeded in their division. In the event of any ties in conference standing, the Executive Secretary drew lots to determine seedings for divisional tournaments. (25)

The thirty-two schools were divided into four divisions, with each division holding a divisional tournament at the end of their conference play. The schools in the four divisions were:

<u>Division I</u>	<u>Division II</u>
Billings Central	Billings Senior
Great Falls Public	Billings West
Great Falls Russell	Glasgow
Havre	Glendive
Helena	Hardin
Laurel	Miles City
Lewistown	Sidney
Livingston	Wolf Point

Division III

Anaconda
Anaconda Central
Butte Public
Butte Central
Bozeman
Deer Lodge
Dillon
Hamilton

Division IV

Columbia Falls
Great Falls Central
Helena Central
Kalispell
Libby
Missoula Hellgate
Missoula Sentinel
Whitefish

The teams were seeded for divisional tournaments on the basis of their relative standings in the Big 32 Conference with relationship to the other teams in their division. For example the team with the highest won-lost percentage in its division was seeded first place in its divisional tournament, and the team with the second highest won-lost percentage in its division was seeded second place in its divisional tournament, and so forth until all teams were seeded in their respective divisional tournaments.

The bracketing for divisional tournament play was set up as follows: first place team versus eighth place team; fourth place team versus fifth place team; second place team versus seventh place team; and third place team versus sixth place team. (26)

The top two teams from each divisional tournament advanced to the Class A state tournament. If the team that finished third in the divisional tournament had not met the second place team during the tournament, a "challenge game" was played for second place and the right to advance to the state tournament. The challenge game was played the following Monday at the tournament site or at a site agreed upon by the two schools involved. (27)

This chapter was devoted to the development of the present class structures in Montana basketball. The chapter which follows will present a complete discussion of the study that was conducted on how basketball organization for large schools might be improved.

Five high school administrators, who were formerly basketball coaches in the state, were asked their opinions on the conference to get their viewpoints from the administrative angle. Some of these men were also on the committee which helped organize the Big 32 Conference. These administrators were chosen because of their availability to the investigator.

Three college professors who had previously coached and had been administrators in Montana were asked to express their views. These people were interviewed because of their expressed interest in this study.

The Executive Secretary of the Montana High School Association was interviewed because of his experience and knowledge of the past and present basketball structures of Montana.

Collection of Information. The people interviewed for this study were asked to express their opinions on the present Big 32 plan and to state the things they liked and disliked about the organization of this conference. The coaches were interviewed within a period of three months. Some coaches and administrators were interviewed while they were in Bozeman. Others were contacted during the Class A state tournament, the past March, in Butte. A major portion of those interviewed were contacted in May at Missoula during the state interscholastic track meet. An organizational meeting for a Montana Coaches Association was conducted at that time, thereby a large number of coaches were available for interviewing.

CHAPTER III

A STUDY OF CHANGES NEEDED IN THE BIG 32 CONFERENCE

This study was conducted for the purpose of determining whether the basketball program for the large schools in Montana was satisfactory and how this program might perhaps be improved. This investigation was prompted by many interested and concerned school personnel because they felt that an adjustment was desirable. This chapter is organized to include discussions of how this study was conducted, and secondly what the results of the study were.

How This Study Was Conducted

The following section is organized to include discussion, first, of the participants in the study, then, of how information was collected, and finally, of how the data was analyzed.

Participants in the Study. The coaches of the Big 32 Conference were the major contributors to this study. Twenty-eight of the thirty-two coaches were interviewed and asked for their opinions on the present Big 32 Conference. The four coaches that were not interviewed were unavailable for interviews when this study was conducted. The coaches opinion were used as the major content since it was believed that they were involved in the conference more than anyone else; thus, it was presumed that they might give the most usable opinions.

The persons interviewed were not informed, however, that the information collected was to be used in this study. The reason for this was to try to eliminate personal gripes and prejudices from interfering with their statements. The material collected was not designed to better any one school but rather to aid the conference as a whole.

The information received from these interviews, generally pertaining to scheduling, conference play and tournament seeding, was recorded immediately after the interview.

Analysis of Data. The major problem of this study was to determine what changes, in the opinions of the coaches, were needed to improve the Big 32 Conference. The problems that were mentioned most often were grouped as the major topics of concern. As the different problems were tabulated they were placed under these major topics which will be discussed in the results of the study which is reported in the section which follows.

Results of the Study

The coaches, with few exceptions, were satisfied with the basic plan of the Big 32. There were, however, several justifiable complaints expressed. The complaints that were expressed most frequently by the coaches will now be discussed.

Many of the coaches were dissatisfied with their schools' basketball schedules. Some in the smaller schools felt that they did not get a chance to play some of the larger schools, even though they were in the same town or a very short distance away. They felt that since they were in the same conference, it was only logical that the larger schools should be on their schedule. In addition, it was deemed financially practical for the schools to play other schools which were located in the same general proximity. This would also cut down on the loss of valuable school time for the ball players. Tradition has been another influential factor in the scheduling of games. For example, in the former class structure the larger schools played, for the most part, just the larger schools. This having been the situation it was difficult for the smaller schools to get some of the larger schools on their schedules.

The most prevailing dissatisfaction among all of those interviewed was that too little emphasis and importance had been placed on conference play. This was only natural because there were entirely too many teams for just one conference. For all practical purposes there was no conference since all teams did not play each other. On the other hand, it was the sentiment of many of those interviewed that the divisional tournaments had entirely too much emphasis and importance placed upon their outcome, because the first and second place teams were automati-

cally seeded in the state tournament. It was the opinion of most of the coaches that there should be a more equitable way of seeding teams for tournament play.

Another point brought out by the coaches was that the Big 32 Conference championship was not necessarily awarded to the best Class A team in the state. This was very definitely a realistic evaluation because it was simply impossible for any one team to play all of the other thirty-one teams in the conference. Furthermore, the geographic dispersion of schools prohibited all of the schools from playing each other.

The final, major problem of the present structure is the method used to qualify teams for the state tournament. Under the present system a team can only qualify for the state tournament by placing first or second in its divisional tournament. This procedure is agreed upon as being highly inequitable. For instance, a team that has proven itself during the four-month basketball season by winning a high percentage of its games could, under the present system, lose one game in a three-day divisional tournament and thereby not qualify for the state tournament. It is the opinion of the coaches that more value should be placed on the caliber of play during the four-month season than on the caliber of play during the three-day divisional tournaments.

Three different proposals or plans were brought to the

author's attention from interviews with the coaches of the Big 32. Three plans will be referred to as Plans A, B, and C.

In Plan A, the thirty-two schools would be divided into four divisions of eight teams each. The schools would then play each team in their division on a home and home basis. This would give each of them a fourteen game conference schedule. In order to complete their schedule, they would schedule six to eight games with other teams, fulfilling their allotted maximum of twenty-two games. The top four teams in conference play would then advance to two regional tournaments. In addition, there would be a play-off game between the fourth and fifth place teams in each division, in order to determine the fourth place position. The regional tournaments would be played right after conference play ended. As a result, the top four teams from each of the two regional tournaments would then advance to the Class A state tournament. The winner of this eight-team tournament would, hence, determine the Class A state champion.

Plan A has some merit; however, it has one major disadvantage. Plan A recommends that there should be two regional tournaments held at the end of regular conference play. The top four teams in each of the four divisions would advance to one of the two regional tournaments. This plan calls for a play-off game between the fourth and fifth place teams in each division which would determine the four place representative from that division.

The plan, nevertheless, automatically eliminates the sixth, seventh, and eighth place teams from any chance of participating in the state tournament. This method of elimination seems unfair to the bottom teams that may have improved immensely as the season developed. This would cancel any chance of their advancing to the regional tournaments.

Plan B, an additional plan devised by a coach of one of the smaller schools in the Big 32, was to make two sixteen-team leagues of the Big 32. These would be called the "Big 16" and the "Little 16", the former composed of large schools and the latter of smaller schools. Each league would have two eight-team conferences.

The proposal was that the teams would play each other in their respective conference on a home and home basis, and a divisional tournament would follow at the end of the season. The top four teams from each of the two divisional tournaments would, therefore, advance to the Big 16 state tournament. The winner of this tournament would, as a result, be declared the Big 16 champion.

The same arrangement would hold true for the Little 16. They would have two divisions and two conference schedules. At the end of conference play two divisional tournaments would be held. The top four teams from each of the two Little 16 conferences would advance to a state tournament. The winner of this eight-

team tournament would then be declared the Little 16 state champion.

Plan B provided for a division of the present thirty-two schools into two separate sixteen-team leagues. Each league would play independently of the other. This plan reverts to the former four-class structure used in Montana from 1955 until 1963. This prior class structure proved inadequate and unsatisfactory which thereby would seem to eliminate this proposal.

Plan C called for four divisions with eight teams in each conference. This plan would have each team in a division play each other on a home and home basis. This would give each team fourteen conference games. The teams could then, at their discretion, schedule a maximum of six to eight non-conference games. The latter would complete their schedule for each team, according to the Montana High School Association, is allowed to play a maximum of twenty-two games. A divisional conference champion would then be declared by the conference standings. This conference champion would automatically be seeded in the state tournament.

The four conference winners from the four divisions would then represent half of the eight teams required for the Class A state tournament. The fact that each conference champion would involuntarily be seeded in the state tournament would naturally and desirably place more emphasis and value on each team's

performance in their respective conference. It would then be necessary to have four divisional tournaments with the other seven teams in each division. Finally, the winners of the four divisional tournaments would complete the field of eight teams needed in the state tournament.

Plan C stipulates that the four divisional conference champions be automatically seeded in the state tournament, thereby giving the season play much more value. It also calls for the remaining seven teams in each of the four divisions to have divisional tournaments, with the winner of each of the four tournaments advancing to the state tournament. This provides a chance, theoretically, for any team to have an opportunity to advance to the state tournament. This plan would reduce the financial burden of the schools by grouping the schools in each conference in a closer proximity. Plan C would provide for a realistic conference which would thus promote more spectator interest.

Summary

This study was conducted by interviewing the coaches and interested personnel of the Big 32 Conference. Their opinions of this conference were recorded after each interview. This material was then tabulated for clarification of the problems and for plans that would improve the Big 32 Conference.

One plan called for a four-conference league with eight teams

in each conference. The teams in each conference would play each team on a home and home basis. The top four teams from conference play in each division would advance to one of the two regional tournaments at the end of regular season play. The top four teams from each of the two regional tournaments would then advance to the Class A state tournament.

Another plan called for a division of the thirty-two teams in the conference. The largest sixteen teams would be placed in the "Big 16" and the smallest sixteen schools would be placed in the "Little 16" conference. Each of these conferences would be divided into two eight-team divisions. A divisional tournament would be held for each and the top four teams would then advance to their respective state tournament. The "Big 16" and "Little 16" would each have a state champion declared by the winner of their respective state tournament.

The last plan called for a four-division league of the thirty-two schools involved. Each team would play each other in its division on a home and home basis. The team with the best conference record, in each of the four divisions, would automatically be seeded in the state tournament. The other seven teams, in each division, would hold a divisional tournament and the winner from each of these tournaments would advance to fill the other four places in the state tournament.

One limitation of this study was the inability of determining whether the reasons given in the interviews were to help the conference as a whole or only the school each coach represented.

Another limitation was that the views of four coaches were not included. Another perhaps, might be that few administrators were consulted. The type of analysis used, simple grouping of ideas and opinions, may have prevented some of the ideas presented by the coaches and other participants in the study from receiving full consideration. Another consideration, of course, must be that the investigator himself was a coach in the Big 32 Conference, thus, possibly his views were given more attention than were those of others.

CHAPTER IV

Recommendations

It is recommended from this study that the basic plan of the Big 32 Conference be retained; however, the thirty-two schools should be further divided into four eight team divisions. Each team should be required to play each of the other teams in its division on a home and home basis. This would give each team a fourteen game conference schedule. Each of the teams would be allowed to schedule a maximum of eight additional games with teams outside of their division bringing their totals to twenty-two games apiece, the maximum of twenty-two being that allowed by the Montana High School Association. The team in each division that has the highest percentage of wins in conference play at the end of the season would then be declared the conference champion of that division. A trophy would be awarded to each of the four conference champions.

The four divisional champions would be automatically seeded into the state tournament. Each division would hold a divisional tournament the week end following conference play in which the remaining seven teams in each division would participate. The four winners would then advance, the following week end, to the eight team state tournament. The winner of this tournament would then be declared the Big 32 state champion.

It is also recommended that five schools change from their present divisions to others in order to make each division more compact. The change would cut down on the travel and thereby reduce the cost to the schools involved. It would also cut down on lost student school time since the teams would not have to travel as far as they have in previous years. The schools involved in the change are Deer Lodge, Great Falls Central, Hamilton, Helena Central and Livingston. After this change the four divisions in the Big 32 League would contain the following schools. Division I would embrace Billings Central, Great Falls Public, Great Falls Central, Great Falls Russell, Havre, Helena, Laurel and Lewistown; Division II would include Billings Senior, Billings West, Glasgow, Glendive, Hardin, Miles City, Sidney and Wolf Point; Division III would involve Anaconda, Anaconda Central, Butte, Butte Central, Bozeman, Dillon, Helena Central and Livingston; Division IV would consist of Columbia Falls, Deer Lodge, Hamilton, Kalispell, Libby, Missoula Hellgate, Missoula Sentinel and Whitefish.

In summary, the changes suggested in divisional representation are that Great Falls Central would change from Division 4 to Division 1, Helena Central would change from Division 4 to Division 3, Livingston would change from Division 1 to Division 3, Deer Lodge would change from Division 3 to Division 4, and Hamilton would change from Division 3 to Division

4.

Further research is recommended to determine if there should be any schools moved in or out of the conference, due to the shifts in population within each school district. It is finally recommended, in keeping with the tradition of change in Montana basketball, that the basketball class structure, not only in Class A but in Class B and Class C as well, receive continuous appraisal in future years.

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