The North Carolina High School Athletic Association has announced possible changes concerning high school football.

The NCHSAA has put together a sub committee that has recommended shortening the football season by reducing the regular season to 11 weeks. And bye weeks for teams playing an 11-game schedule would be eliminated.

The start of practice would remain the same, but the state playoffs would begin a week earlier and they would end a week earlier.

"Shortening the season is fine with me," said Watauga High football coach Tim Pruitt. "Whatever is good for the kids is good for me. There's a couple of teams we won't renew our contracts with (Shelby and A.C. Reynolds) after this (2010) season is over, and playing 10 games and finding one opponent to fill that void on the schedule will be much easier to do."

The 64-team field in each classification will stay intact, but the state would be divided into four sections: west, midwest, east, mid-east under a pod system that would reduce travel in the first round of the state playoffs.

"This will help most teams with travel in the first round," said Pruitt. "Now, if this system was in affect last year, North Stokes, instead of playing at home, would have traveled 200 miles for their first playoff game.

"The pod system won't help every team, but it will be a benefit to most of the teams around the state."

The other argument about the pod system is that one region of the state might be overloaded with a strong group of teams. And teams like Butler and Independance could end up meeting much sooner than later in the state playoffs. Those teams squared off in the Class 4AA western finals last fall.

"Last year, the top three seeds would have been in the midwest region," said Pruitt. "It's not a perfect system, but the state is trying to save money on travel. This pod system would have saved something like 6,000 miles in travel in the first round alone last season."

And this latest proposal would also relieve the strain between football and the winter sports season. The high school basketball season now begins the Monday before the final regular-season game. But under this new system, basketball and winter sports practice would officially begin the first Monday after the opening round of the state playoffs.

The NCHSAA will hold a hearing on the matter next Tuesday, May 4 and will most likely vote on the issue the next day, Wednesday, May 5. And if the proposal passes, this new system will be instituted in 2011.

"I truly believe it will go through," said Pruitt. "But I wish they would start practice at least a week eariler. We officially begin practice on August 2nd, and our first game is

August 20th (against Ashe County). It doesn't give us much time to prepare.
"And at this level, preparation and learning the fundamentals are so important. I wish our practice time would be increased, but I don't see that happening."