Written by Mike Kelly
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As expected, the North Carolina High School Athletic Association is reducing the football and basketball seasons beginning in the fall of 2011.

The NCHSAA Board of Dirctors approved by a 13-7 vote to lessen the football season from 12 weeks to 11 weeks. The basketball season, under this agreement, will start no earlier than November 22. That schedule concerning basketball goes into effect this fall, and winter sports practice will begin on Nov. 1. The issue was passed on May 6 in Chapel Hill.

This will somewhat avoid the fall and winter seasons overlapping one another, which has been a problem since the football playoffs were expanded to 64 teams per classification in 2003.

A pod system concerning travel in the first two rounds of the state playoffs has also been implemented. And it will begin this fall as well. The classifications (Class 1A, 1AA, 2A, 2AA, 3A, 3AA, 4A, 4AA) will be divided up into four sections: West, Midwest, Mideast and East.

According to NCHSAA Executive Associate Director Rick Strunk, this system would have saved the state more than 9,000 miles of travel last fall. If this system was in use last season, the Watauga High football team would have been in the Class 4A West with Alexander Central, T.C. Roberson, Sun Valley, Porter Ridge, A.C. Reynolds, Mount Tabor and East Gaston.

And instead of opening the state playoffs at Ragsdale, like they did last season, the Pioneers would have opened the playoffs in Taylorsville against Alexander Central.

The only drawback with the pod system is that elite teams, like Butler and Independance for example, could meet in an early-round match up. Those two squared off in the Class 4AA Western Finals last fall.

And instead of playing an 11-game schedule with a bye week, teams will play ten games with a bye week in 2011. If teams elect to play an 11-game schedule, they will not be awarded a bye week from the state association.

The WHS football team opens its season at home (the newly built Jack Groce Stadium) on Friday, August 20 against Ashe County.