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Previews and Lax Power by Byron Stankus

PREVIEWS

With most schools coming off spring break, the lacrosse schedule is going to start to bring us some interesting games. Friday, April 13 has a number of match ups between potential playoff teams. And some games that follow will be interesting as well.

Friday, April 13...Hamilton Southeastern @ Carmel This is easily the game of the week. This could potentially be a preview of the Championship game or at least a Semi-final game. Last year the two juggernauts split their two games with HSE winning the regular season game and Carmel taking revenge in the Semi-finals on their way to a seventh straight championship game appearance. Expect to see a lot of offense.

Heritage Christian @ Crown Point – Crown Point Bulldogs seems to be making a name for themselves with a 6-2 record to this point. But their wins aren't as impressive as a 10-6 loss to Culver may be. And Heritage is reeling off of their loss of their starting goalie and needs to get on track or risk missing the playoffs.

Park Tudor @ Noblesville – Noblesville feels like they may have righted the ship after two wins over Spring Break in St. Louis and Park Tudor to really start to get their season rolling. One of these two teams will show us that they are on the right track.

Wednesday, April 18

Westfield @ Zionsville – This will be a test for Westfield to see how far they have really come this year. It could be a statement game for them. The statement just may be that Zionsville will reaffirm that it is a top team, though.

Culver @ St. Joseph's – This game is not in the local area (South Bend) but pay attention to the final on this. It is a rivalry game so I expect it to be close. It is the first big test for both teams in state and it will be a comparative measure for other teams looking to play either of them.

Saturday, April 21-Culver @ Zionsville – This game may set the stage for a top four seeding. Zionsville already dispatched Guerin Catholic, which was a contender for a top 4 spot. Now can they hold off Culver? Culver will have already shown us a bit what they are made of with the St. Joseph's game. Will it be too much for Zionsville? In the Battle of the Eagles, which one will soar.

LAX POWER

Many years ago the IHSLA moved away from coaches' polls to determine playoffs and state rankings. There was too much perceived bias in the polls and a new way to rank teams was settled upon: Lax Power. Lax Power was chosen because it was a third party system and was therefore not perceived to have any bias. It is a computer ranking system that analyzes all of the games played, around the entire country, and rates/ranks the teams according to its algorithm. The IHSLA went even further to try and impart fairness into the process by having Lax Power exclude out-of-state competition from the computation. That way teams were neither rewarded nor penalized for playing out-of-state games and only games against in state opponents were considered. But what this has done is put a bit of confusion into the minds of the casual fan when looking at Lax Power.

The Rankings: The rankings can only calculate the games and scores that are played and entered. At this point most teams have only played a few games so there is little for the computer to analyze and the rankings aren't necessarily that accurate. Trends will start to arise soon, but as the season progresses the rankings will become more accurate.

Right now, for example, one win or loss can move a team quite a bit in the rankings and change their Power Ranking score (PR) by several points. But late in the season, it will be very difficult to move your score more than about a .10 of a point. But playoff positions hinge on as little as .01 of a point, which can make the end of the season a bit of a nail-biter for some teams.

The IHSLA does reserve the right to adjust the ranking slightly to improve match-ups for teams traveling, especially in the early rounds of the playoffs. The league tries not to do this much, if at all, and it has never moved a team more than 1 spot one way or another to aid in travel time.

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