

AHSAA Competitive Balance Part II: Data and New Alignments

Note: this is all based on the opinion of Shoals Sports Report with the occasional information and data. None of this is being implemented in the next cycle

In part I, we looked at the background and introduced the idea of how Alabama currently does the playoff format for high school sports. If you missed part I, you can find it [here](#). This is part two of a four-part series on what a competitive balance scale for public and private schools would look like.

Competitive balance began in Alabama in 2017-18 for private schools, and they have been on it ever since, meaning the more playoff success you have, the more you move up in classification for sports. Alabama does not currently use competitive balance for public schools, but we looked at the data for the sports we cover (football, basketball, baseball, and softball) and took it back to the school year of 2014-2015 and ran the numbers from there. Now you can do the data from however far back and make it say what you want it to say with anything. If I am correct, the AHSAA took the last four years of data when they implemented competitive balance.

Competitive Balance Scale (based on playoff finish)

Round of 16: 0.5 point

Round of 8/Quarterfinals: 1.0 points

Round of 4/Semifinal: 2.0 points

Championship Game: 4.0 points

Football, Baseball, and Softball are counted as individual sports. Basketball counts both boys and girls. [Here](#) is the link to how they count each sport and playoff finish. The points do not stack either, so if you make the championship, it is 4 points, not 7.5. It takes more than 4.0 points to move up a class, 1.0-4.0 points to stay in your current class, and anything below 1.0 points moves you down or relegates you to a lower class. You can only shift up or down one class each cycle.

Football

Football is the unique one here, as we have all the data from this school year, but we found that the football landscape would shift drastically in the Shoals, regardless of whether you use the last ten years or the last two years. Let's begin with the last two years. The most recent cycle would only see one school move up if you use the last two seasons, and that would be Mars Hill, which finished with eight points and is moving to 4A in football in the next cycle. Muscle Shoals, Brooks, and Deshler would all maintain their current class of 6A, 4A, and 4A,

respectively, as they finished with 3, 1, and 1 points, respectively. The following schools finished with 0.5 points: Central, Colbert County, Lauderdale County, and Lexington. The following finished with 0 points: Cherokee, Colbert Heights, Florence, Rogers, Sheffield, Shoals Christian, Waterloo, and Wilson.

So in the 2026-2027 football seasons, here would be the schools for each class based on the last two years.

1A: Cherokee, Lexington (relegated), Shoals Christian, Waterloo

2A: Colbert County (relegated), Colbert Heights (relegated), Lauderdale County (relegated), Rogers (relegated), Sheffield (relegated)

3A: Central (relegated), Wilson (relegated)

4A: Brooks, Deshler, Mars Hill (promoted)

6A: Muscle Shoals, Florence (relegated)

Now, you see how many relegations there are and it does not shift too much aside from 1A and 2A as the rest are what we are used to seeing with one or two, maybe three at the most. However, if you look at the last ten years of data, it would be this for the 2026-2027 seasons.

1A: Central, Cherokee, Colbert County, Colbert Heights, Florence, Lauderdale County, Lexington, Rogers, Sheffield, Shoals Christian, Waterloo, Wilson

3A: Brooks, Deshler

4A: Mars Hill

5A: Muscle Shoals

That would be a drastic shakeup for the Shoals sports scene, and you can see the imbalance with Florence, Lauderdale County, Wilson, etc, all in 1A with schools like Cherokee and Shoals Christian.

We will cover the pros and cons of this in part III, but up next is another drastic shakeup in basketball.

Basketball

Basketball does not have all the data for this current cycle, so we will be using the data from the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years and what it would look like for the current cycle of 2024-2026. Basketball also counts boys and girls teams together so instead of 4.0 or more points to move up you need more than 7.0 points. 2.0 to 4.0 points maintain your classification. Less than 2.0 points relegates one class.

We will start with the schools that would have moved up, and it would have been Covenant Christian to 2A and Mars Hill to 3A who had 9.0 points and 14 points, respectively. The following would have maintained their classification Brooks (4A), Deshler (4A), Lauderdale

County (3A), Muscle Shoals (6A), Shoals Christian (1A) as they all finished between 2.0 and 4.0 points. The following would have moved down a class due to not having 2.0 points: Central, Cherokee, Colbert County, Colbert Heights, Florence, Lexington, Rogers, Sheffield, Waterloo, Wilson.

So the current classification for 2024-2026 would be

- 1A: Cherokee, Lexington (relegated), Shoals Christian, Sheffield (relegated), Waterloo
- 2A: Colbert County, Colbert Heights, Covenant Christian (promoted)
- 3A: Central, Lauderdale County, Mars Hill (promoted), Rogers (relegated), Wilson (relegated)
- 4A: Brooks, Deshler
- 6A: Muscle Shoals, Florence (relegated)

Note: Rogers was 4A in 2022-2024. Sheffield was 2A in 2022-2024.

If you take the data back from 2014-2016, then it would have major shifts in the area.

- 1A: Central, Cherokee, Colbert County, Colbert Heights, Florence, Lexington, Rogers, Sheffield, Shoals Christian, Waterloo, Wilson
- 2A: Brooks, Covenant Christian
- 3A: Mars Hill, Muscle Shoals
- 5A: Deshler
- 6A: Lauderdale County

The biggest changes there are due to the Lauderdale County girls winning five championships in a row, as well as the boys making the Final Four. Deshler girls made the Final Four, winning a couple of championships and playing for several more.

We will cover the pros and cons of this in part III, but up next is baseball.

Baseball

Baseball, like basketball, does not have all the data for this cycle, so we will use the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 data. We also shift back to counting it as one sport, so this will be like football with the numbers.

We will start with the schools that would be promoted and that is none in baseball, so every team would either maintain or be relegated to a class below. The ones that would maintain are Brooks (4A), Deshler (4A), Lauderdale County (3A), Mars Hill (2A) as they had 1, 1, 3, and 2 points respectively. Mars Hill is a 2A based on enrollment before the competitive balance factor was counted. The following would move down a class: Central, Colbert County, Colbert Heights, Florence, Lexington, Muscle Shoals, Rogers, Sheffield, Wilson.

So for the current classification 2024-2026, you would have.

1A: Cherokee, Covenant Christian, Lexington (relegated), Sheffield (relegated), Shoals Christian, Waterloo

2A: Colbert County (relegated), Colbert Heights (relegated), Mars Hill

3A: Central (relegated), Lauderdale County, Rogers (relegated), Wilson (relegated)

4A: Brooks, Deshler

5A: Muscle Shoals (relegated)

6A: Florence (relegated)

Note: Rogers was 4A in 2022-2024. Sheffield was 2A in 2022-2024.

If you take the data back from 2014-2016, then it would have major shifts in the area. 2020 skews the data as it was only the 2019 season accounted for.

1A: Central, Cherokee, Colbert County, Colbert Heights, Covenant Christian, Deshler, Lexington, Muscle Shoals, Rogers, Sheffield, Shoals Christian, Waterloo, Wilson

2A: Lauderdale County

3A: Florence

5A: Brooks, Mars Hill

The major shifts in baseball would be in part due to Brooks and Mars Hill winning a state championship in 2018 and 2019, respectively.

We will cover the pros and cons of this in part III, but up next is softball.

Softball

Softball is similar to football and baseball in being counted as one sport. However, the big shift with softball is the playoff format. Football, Basketball, and Baseball all use a similar 32-team playoff format where it plays out 32 to 16 to 8 to 4 to 2 to 1 team(s) left. Softball uses double elimination brackets from the area tournament to the regionals to the state tournament. In softball, to reach the quarterfinals/round of eight, you must make the state tournament. Making the Round of 16 requires you to make the Qualifier 2 game. (loser bracket final at regionals)

Let's start with the ones that would move up a class. Brooks is the only one who would have been promoted with 6.0 points. The ones that would maintain are Mars Hill and Waterloo with 2.0 and 3.0 points each. The ones that would go down are Central, Cherokee, Colbert County, Colbert Heights, Covenant Christian, Deshler, Florence, Lauderdale County, Lexington, Muscle Shoals, Rogers, Sheffield, Shoals Christian, and Wilson.

So, for the current classification 2024-2026, you would have.

1A: Cherokee, Covenant Christian, Lexington (relegated), Sheffield (relegated), Shoals Christian, Waterloo

2A: Colbert County (relegated), Colbert Heights (relegated), Lauderdale County (relegated)

3A: Central (relegated), Deshler (relegated), Mars Hill, Rogers (relegated), Wilson (relegated)

4A: Muscle Shoals (relegated)

5A: Brooks (promoted)

6A: Florence (relegated)

Note: Rogers was 4A in 2022-2024. Sheffield was 2A in 2022-2024.

The biggest shifts would be in part because of Brooks making a run at the state tournament and finishing in third place and runner-up. Mars Hill was a 3A in softball for 2022-2024 already so they would rise to 4A.

If you take the data back from 2014-2016, then it would have major shifts in the area. 2020 skews the data as it was only the 2019 season accounted for.

1A: Central, Cherokee, Colbert County, Colbert Heights, Covenant Christian, Deshler, Florence, Lauderdale County, Lexington, Muscle Shoals, Sheffield, Shoals Christian, Waterloo, Wilson

2A: Brooks, Rogers

6A: Mars Hill

This is a larger sample size, but the biggest jump is Mars Hill, and that is due to their prolonged success, including a championship in 2019. Rogers and Brooks both stay above 1A due to runs at state and regionals.

Conclusion

There will never be a perfect answer for any of this, but this is an interesting look at what could be if everyone were subject to competitive balance. There are pros and cons to all four of these sports, looking like this, and in part III, we will dive into the pros/cons of each, looking at how each sport is played as well. In football, there are some games we will never see due to the number of players on a team or the size/speed of players. Basketball, the schedules open up more with the smaller class teams playing up, and then baseball/softball, there are numerous teams that play up/down in competition due to the nature of the sport.

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Shoals Sports Report