

AHSAA Competitive Balance Part IV: The Solution(s)

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](#). In part II, we looked at what the data would have suggested for alignments over the last ten years across football, basketball, baseball, and softball. If you missed part II, you can find it [here](#). In part III, we looked at the pros and cons of this idea. If you missed part III, you can find it [here](#). This is our fourth and final part of a four-part series on what a competitive balance scale for public and private schools would look like.

There are obvious issues with the idea of competitive balance statewide, and with each issue comes a solution or possible solutions. You cannot please everyone, but you can mitigate imbalances. The easy solution says to split it based on success, but how fair would it be when the big schools come down a couple of classes after some rough years? They would still have larger rosters and bigger players.

The first solution we present is a class balance system. With this, you could not go beyond two classifications of your current class. If you read part II, you can see that Brooks and Deshler would be 3A football in 2026-27. If you use the ten years of data, Brooks would be a 2A basketball. They are currently a 4A. Florence would be 3A in baseball. That is too much of a gap for Florence to play in our opinion. So with this, you still count the enrollment of each school as a base. Then you cap relegation so any 4A or higher cannot move down more than two classes below. Example: Florence can be low as 5A, Muscle Shoals low as 4A, Any 4A low as 2A, 3A can be low as 1A. However, you can climb as high as you can with no limit.

The other side of this is promotion for success. In this, you would not cap success. Bayside Academy went from 3A to 7A in volleyball once competitive balance was put in. Mars Hill is about to play 4A football in 2026-27 and will have played 1A, 2A, 3A, and 4A football in only fifteen years or less of their football program. It would take many years to move up to 7A for any football program, but at this current rate, Mars Hill would need to make the semifinals one season and the state championship game the other in football to be 5A in 2028-2029. Then do that again to be 6A in 2030-2031. Then, once again in 2030-31, to move up to 7A. So you are talking about players who are currently in elementary/middle school who would play on those teams.

Another possible solution is cutting off 7A from the AHSAA and making it a national class in theory. This idea was suggested in part by another great content creator in the high school sports space in Alabama, "Hall-Tech Sports. (@HallTechSports1) On Twitter. I'm going

to link the post [here](#). In summary, you split 7A into East/West, and they can play three games versus anyone in the nation. This would keep a common principle in non-region games, but then they get five region games, and in short, you have an in-season playoff based on data collected in-season. The data would be various points like strength of schedule, points scored, points allowed, etc. If you watch our playoff previews, we get into strength of schedule and strength of record because you can be 10-0 but not as good as an 8-2 team based on who you lost to. Imagine Florence goes 10-0 but plays three non-region games with Columbia, Decatur, and Cullman. Then, imagine James Clemens goes 7-3, but the three losses are Buford (GA), Carrollton (GA), both teams are nationally ranked and played for the GHSAA Championship in 2025, and the other loss is Florence. That's where the data may have James Clemens over Florence based on the strength of the record.

How this could work for 1A-6A is you use the data to seed for the playoffs. We have all said or thought this from time to time. Why are the two best teams playing before the championship game? We will see this in basketball this season, but last year alone, we had at least two marquee matchups in regionals before the semifinals. That you could argue was the state championship game before the actual championship game. Mars Hill and Lauderdale County girls and Huntsville versus Hoover boys. With this solution, They play the seasons as normal, but once you win sub-regionals or clinch playoffs, it goes to a "committee" that seeds the four teams for regionals and the Final Four. Football and baseball may do this, but travel would be the issue. Maybe they reseed at the quarterfinals once it is down to four on each half of the bracket. This works best for sports like basketball and softball, where it's regionals, then state for playoffs.

This next solution may be the easiest or most complicated, but you make it so that you can be relegated as much as needed. Yes, I'm talking about a 7A can be a 1A in certain sports if needed. However, you keep traditional 1A and 2A but add a 1A-CB and 2A-CB (CB meaning competitive balance). Looking at baseball, there would be 13 schools from our coverage area in 1A if you go back with ten years of data. Only five are traditional 1A or 2A in enrollment. The other eight would go into 1A-CB and 2A-CB or 1A-2A CB, the name would need some work, but this way you separate the bigger schools from dominating the smaller schools. This would promote fairness and competition, so you would have eight or nine classifications: 7A, 6A, 5A, 4A, 3A, 2A, 1A, 2A-CB/1A-CB, or 1A-2A CB. This means more scheduling for state championships and regional playoffs with all sports.

We know the hot topic now is the potential split of private/public schools, and that has its own can of worms to open. There are other issues on both sides of that, but if you read all four parts of this series, we hope you see where we are coming from. We know the CHOOSE Act is the main reason behind the possible split. However, I think most coaches, if you ask them if they want to play the best to win a championship, they would say yes. There is a certain pride and joy you cannot take away from someone when they beat the best or the dynasty that no one thought could lose, especially when it is for the championship.

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