

AHSAA Competitive Balance Part I: Introduction and Background

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

The AHSAA (Alabama High School Athletic Association) has made changes to how they do state championships numerous times, whether it was football going from area (3-5 teams) to region (6-9 teams) or the bracket increasing from 16 to 32. The two most recent changes have worked fairly well. In 2014, they introduced 7A as a new class featuring the 32 largest high schools in the state. The most recent change was in 2017 and put into effect during the school years of 2017-18 and 2018-19 and that was the implementation of the competitive balance factor, [linked here](#). What this did was it was a way to promote or relegate private schools based on postseason success. While it has worked for the most part and broken up dynasties in some sports, there are still flaws to it. There are also still the cries of separate public and private schools for the postseason. There are some who still believe it does not matter either way. We are about to look at what it would be like if the AHSAA implemented a competitive balance factor for all public and private schools. This is part one of four, where we are diving into what a new AHSAA would look like under the new competitive balance factor.

Alabama does not currently split the public and private schools, but some surrounding states do. Tennessee is often brought up by many as an example due to the complete split of public and private schools in championship play. Tennessee also uses a competitive balance factor in football and basketball, at least so that a school could play in two separate classes regardless of public/private. Georgia split the public and private schools in their smaller classes in 2012 after years with a multiplier showed that the multiplier did not have enough impact. There are numerous rules for each state, and you can see some of them [here](#).

The AHSAA reclassifies every two years. We are currently in the 2024-2026 cycle, which runs across the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 school years. They take the average daily enrollment, which is provided by the state department, over the first several weeks of school. They only count the 9th, 10th, and 11th grade as those that will be competing in the next cycle plus not every school is K-12 or 6-12, etc. So the middle schools, elementary schools, etc., are not counted. The public schools count each kid as one, so a school of 100 students would have an enrollment number of 100. Private schools are put on a 1.35 multiplier, meaning the school with 100 kids would be 135 in a private school, due to private schools being able to pick and choose who is in their school, versus a public school being zoned by a district. So, from the jump, the private schools are being treated differently than the public schools then add in the competitive balance factor, and a private school can climb the ranks very quickly.

However, not all schools are created equal. Yes, they are created equal in the sense of providing education, but when it comes to athletics, not all are the same. There are schools where the athletic funds are split into what some would call the Quarterback club (football), the Tip-Off club (basketball), or the Diamond club (baseball/softball), etc. Then, some schools have what most call Athletic Booster Clubs, where all the money goes into one pot. There are pros and cons to both styles, but this already creates a divide in competition when one school can have the newest, best equipment, versus another using equipment that is not as new or good. Some schools put more effort into some sports than others due to resources or volunteers. Running any athletic event at a school takes well over 10-20 if not more people from the administration, coaches, concession workers, then the clean-up crews at the end of the night. However, once again, not all schools are created equal. For example, a 6A school will be able to have more help than a 1A or 2A would because of numbers.

Some schools are synonymous with high school sports. You say the school name, and you can think oh that's the great football program (Fyffe, Hoover, Thompson, Mars Hill, etc), or that's the great basketball program (Deshler, Lauderdale County, Mountain Brook, etc.). The only private school I named directly was Mars Hill. However, Bayside Academy once won every volleyball championship from 2002-2022 across 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A, and 6A. The last five championships were higher classes due to competitive balance but they are a 3A school in numbers in the most recent cycle. In 2023, they (Bayside Academy) lost to Mountain Brook in the 6A Semifinals, and it sent shockwaves across the state, and a sense of the competitive balance factor did its job.

The competitive balance factor has even seen its effect locally in the Shoals. There are three private schools that are subject to it in the Shoals and they are Covenant Christian (Tuscumbia), Mars Hill Bible School (Florence), and Shoals Christian (Florence). Only two of them have seen the effects since the rule came into place. Covenant Christian is playing 2A basketball and volleyball despite being a 1A in numbers. Mars Hill has moved up to 3A in football and is going 4A in 2026-2027. Mars Hill has also seen a jump in basketball and softball (3A) as well as soccer (4A).

Where are we going with this? Over the next couple of weeks, we are going to pull data/information from the last 10 years at least and the last few cycles where competitive balance has been in effect, plus how the public schools would have fared with it, the pros and cons of competitive balance statewide, and lastly solutions. In Part II, we will feature the data and information on how the public schools may have gone up and would have come down from cycle to cycle. Once again, this is not being proposed to the AHSAA (not to our knowledge, at least).

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