

JOE SCALZO | *Football Insider*

## Thoughts on postseason; courage is not an option



Over my 6½ years at *The Vindicator*, I've never been afraid to shake things up and make bold predictions in print. Today is no different.

Ready? OK. I think Cardinal

Mooney will win the Div. IV state football championship.

Now I know what you're thinking. Courageous, right?

What can I say? I'm going with my gut on this one. And my gut tells me that in my 6½ years here, there's only two teams that could hang with this year's Mooney team: last year's Cardinals, which won the state title, and the 2002 Warren Harding team, which lost in the Div. I state final.

I think this year's team is better

than both those teams.

As for my other predictions, I think Ursuline will win the Div. V crown, but I don't think Warren JFK will win Div. VI. (Side note: How good would the Eagles be if WR Desmar Jackson hadn't transferred to Warren Harding to focus on basketball? Jackson might be the best pure athlete I've seen since Boardman's Amber Bland.)

### *Encounters facing Howland and Canfield*

In Div. II, Howland has a good chance of winning its region, especially after the hazing scandal that hit a pretty talented Tallmadge team over the past few weeks.

Canfield, however, is in a much tougher region, which features the state's top-ranked team, Columbus DeSales, along with perennial powers Louisville and my be-

loved Lake Blue Streaks, one of four Federal League teams in the postseason.

- The Mahoning Valley has 15 teams in the playoffs this year, which ties the record for most qualifiers. Overall 192 Ohio teams qualify.

Since the OHSAA expanded the playoffs to include eight in each region in 1999, the Valley also had 15 teams in 2002; the lowest was 10 (2003). One idea being floated is expanding to 16 teams in each region and playing a nine-game regular season schedule. It won't happen, but it's an interesting idea.

- Mooney, which is making its fifth straight playoff appearance, has been in the postseason 21 times since 1973, by far the most in the Valley.

The three closest teams are Warren JFK (17th this year), Ursuline (13th) and South Range

(11th), which pretty much guarantees I'll get at least one e-mail concerning the public-parochial debate.

- Area teams that have never made the playoffs are East (although the East Golden Bears made it in 1986 and 1997) and Salem, Jackson-Milton, Sebring, Southern, United and Youngstown Christian.
- The hottest league rumor right now has Wellsville and Southern leaving Tier Two of the Inter Tri-County League and being replaced by Mathews and Youngstown Christian. Sounds OK to me.
- Although every school in the playoffs stresses buying presale tickets, the truth is, they still don't make that much money from it.

For football, schools get 20 percent on each presale ticket. (So, for

a \$6 ticket, they make \$1.20.) The state gets the rest. (They call it a “bonus.” Seriously.)

For a sport like volleyball, it’s even worse: 12.5 percent per ticket, which is 75 cents.

### ***OHSAA should be ashamed of itself***

“It’s absolutely criminal,” said one area athletic director. “The state should be ashamed of themselves.”

Teams also get meal money for players and \$4 per mile for travel, but that’s for one bus only.

So if you have a huge team (or a huge band, like they do at Poland and Boardman), you can easily end up losing money.

Incidentally, it costs \$8 at the gate for a regional volleyball game, which is also criminal. I think you can justify that cost for football,

which is once a week and features bands and cheerleaders and huge crowds and all that stuff. But not the other sports. Those prices just punish parents and students for being loyal.

- Coach Thom McDaniels’ current team (Massillon Jackson) and his two former teams (Warren Harding and Canton McKinley) missed the playoffs this year, but he can still live vicariously through his son, Josh, the offensive coordinator for the New England Patriots.

Since I started with a bold prediction, I’m going to end with one and say the Pats are going to make the postseason this year.

And it wouldn’t be surprising to see the 31-year-old become an NFL head coach in the near future.

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