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## Hunterdon/Warren/Sussex Tournaments a success in first year

By Barry Miller

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County tournaments are big in many parts of New Jersey.

Schools that don't get a chance to face each other during the regular season often get to meet during the county tournaments. Group 1 and 2 schools sometimes get to play Group 3 and 4 schools. It's David vs. Goliath.

In Hunterdon and Warren counties, the county tournament is a different animal. The same schools that faced other during the season in the Skyland Conference often meet all over again.

Sometimes schools from Hunterdon and Warren counties would meet three and sometimes four times during a season if they faced each other in the county tournament and again in the sectional tournaments. That's a lot of times to meet in one season.

Then the **Hunterdon-Warren Association** added the Sussex County schools into the mix this season. From what I'm told, many coaches were lukewarm to the idea at first. But athletic directors say playing new competition has changed that feeling. The new H/W/S Tournaments have generally been a success. New teams, fresh faces added to the excitement.

Each county has had success in the tournament, according the H/W/S President Bob Hopek, the former athletic director at North Hunterdon.

So will there be a second season of the H/W/S Tournaments? School officials will meet June 19 at Warren Hills Regional High School to discuss that very issue.

Hunterdon/Warren Tournament competition will undoubtedly continue but there's no guarantee the Sussex schools will remain in the mix.

Those schools, like most throughout the state, are facing budget constraints. One of the most expensive items on an athletic budget appears to be travel. There's little doubt the H/W/S Tournament puts demands on the travel budget.

Hopek said one of the complaints he's heard this spring about the baseball tournament is the trip to Skylands Park in Augusta.

Patrick Shea, the athletic director at Sparta High School, said his coaches like the idea of facing new competition but he admits the cost may be prohibitive. It's the one issue for which school administrators must try to find a solution to keep the three-county tournament going.

Except for maybe South Jersey, schools in Hunterdon, Warren and Sussex are probably farther apart than anywhere in the state. It seems like High Point and Vernon are just a stone's throw away from the North Pole.



Express-Times File  
Photo

Former North Hunterdon Athletic Director Bob Hopek is president of the Hunterdon/Warren/Sussex Athletic Association.

**"It's still a work in progress,"** Voorhees Athletic Director Al Stumpf reminded me the other day. The arrangement has a lot to offer. Take for instance, the H/W/S Track and Field Championships last weekend at Vernon High School. The meet offered a full complement in each event on an eight-lane track. Stumpf said in previous H/W meets, there would be empty lanes because not all of the H/W schools had track teams.

Our track and field writer **Bruce Buratti**, who's taken a lap or two in his time, called it the best-run meet he's ever attended. That's saying something for a first-year meet.

Let's hope the administrators can put their heads together and work out a plan to keep the costs down and the H/W/S Tournaments alive. The idea is worthy one that needs some fine tuning.

The first year offered a lot of positives that should be saved and continued for years to come.

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