

McCabe: Long road trip in Week 9 is ridiculous



Mick McCabe, Detroit Free Press 9:40 p.m. EDT October 22, 2015



At 8 a.m. Friday, the Canton football players and coaches will hop on two buses and head for their final regular-season game in Galesburg ... Illinois. Illinois? Are they going to do some shopping in Chicago?

"It's not near Chicago," coach Tim Baechler said. "It's like 15 or 20 minutes from Iowa. It's right next to Rock Island."

Each week we have evidence of why high school football scheduling in Michigan is bordering on preposterous. Last week, DeWitt, near Lansing, traveled to Menominee, just across the river from Wisconsin, to play a game.

In Week 2, Kingsford, also in the Upper Peninsula, traveled to DeWitt to play.

But Canton's situation is insane.

According to MapQuest, it should take the Chiefs about 6 hours, 15 minutes to get to Galesburg, where the players will check into their hotel rooms before playing Saturday at noon.

The school district is paying for the two buses, which are not school buses. The rest of the trip is being paid for by Canton's football boosters club and will cost about \$8,000.

The alternative would be to take the week off, like Orchard Lake St. Mary's did last week when it couldn't find an opponent.

"I've honestly thought about going to an eight-game schedule," Baechler said. "But all these kids do is work out and practice for nine guaranteed games. We're going to play nine games."

This long trip was completely avoidable if Plymouth Salem would have agreed to play Canton, like the schools do in every other sport. Instead, the Salem players will get on a bus and ride to Hartland for their final game.

"I don't know anything about what their schedule is," Salem coach Kurt Britnell said. "I just can tell you mine."

Canton and Salem, which are located next to each other, used to play each year until Britnell was able to convince a former administrator to allow him to get out of the game, as well as a game with Plymouth.

"If we were to play Canton, we wouldn't have a true open week to play whoever we want," Britnell said. "And I like having that option."

Britnell blamed the alignment of the Kensington Lakes Athletic Association that has Canton in the South Division and Salem in the Central.

"The fact that how it's set up now with us being in different divisions, that's the problem," he said. "If we were to play Canton, they still get that open week to play whomever."

Britnell does have an open week to schedule whomever — and he chose to schedule Belleville in Week 1.

The truth is that Salem, which has not made the state playoffs since 1991 — while Canton has made it 15 times in the past 16 years — has lost to Canton 14 straight times.

And most of the scheduling problems in the state are directly related to making the playoffs.

That's why Canton (6-2) will play in Galesburg before opening the state playoffs and Salem (3-5) will end its season in Hartland.

On its way to Galesburg, Canton will drive by Rock Island. By the way, on Friday night, Rock Island will play at ... Ypsilanti.

"I called the Ypsilanti coach," Baechler said. "He never called me back."