

The athletic directors from the largest high schools have requested that the South Dakota High School Athletic Association delay a decision on sanctioning high school soccer. The news brought a flurry of comments on both sides. Here's some real information on the issue:

South Dakota, out of 50 states, is the only one that does not sanction high school soccer. Twelve years ago, when it was apparent that athletic directors across the state would not support sanctioning, South Dakota State Soccer Association began to plan for a statewide high school competition. Because there was an expectation that sanctioning would be granted in the future, the SDSSA set up the program meeting all of the requirements that the SDHSAA imposes on all other sports...grades, training times, number of games, duration of the season, contact during the rest of the year, etc. Soccer has adhered to those requirements since the first season eleven years ago.

Players wanted the privilege of playing for their schools and to be able to earn a letter. Each school district was approached for support for lettering players. Some have financially supported the teams while others have not. Rapid City public high schools have allowed letters but all expenses are paid by players, including the letters or pins awarded. St. Thomas More/Rapid City Christian financially support their teams. The relationship varies statewide by school district.

Rapid City high school soccer teams are among the best in the state. The volunteer coaching staff does an outstanding job and the parents have been tireless in finding new fundraising ideas to support their kids. The "pay-to-play" program has allowed many Rapid City kids to qualify for college programs and continue playing.

Because the SDSSA has more than a decade of experience running this program along the exact lines dictated by the high school association, most of the anticipated problems have been solved. The SDHSAA has not talked to the SDSSA about how this program works or what the requirements for coaching should be. If there is no sanction for soccer, it remains as it is – a club sport, pay-to-play, and without the acknowledgement it deserves in the schools.

If soccer is sanctioned, all of the schools that presently play must be part of it otherwise the schools that do not offer it deny their kids a place to play and therefore, a chance at college programs. The announcement by the SDHSAA to delay the decision has created friction among students and fans about

which programs are financially “worth it” and that conversation will only get worse. The SDHSAA should find some middle ground and make this happen now.