

Prep Post Scripts

By Harold Piety

THE ILLINOIS High School Association has been accused of high-handed and autocratic conduct many times, and with some justification. But its incredible blunder in assigning Fred Gibson of Centralia as one of the officials in the Granite City Sectional Tournament last week will long rank in the minds of many area basketball fans as the rankest kind of injustice to Madison High School.

THE ASSIGNMENT was a blunder on the face of it. Gibson from Centralia, and Central was favored to win the Sale Sectional and thereby schedule to meet the winner of the Granite City Sectional in the first round of the state finals. Centralia obviously preferred Belleville (beaten four times) to undefeated Madison as a supersectional opponent. The Orphans' conduct in the dressing room at Salem when they heard the news of Belleville's victory adequately illustrates how highly Centralia regarded Madison.

OFFICIALS, LIKE Caesar's wife, must avoid the appearance of evil, and Gibson, a Centralia official, is not the proper man to assign to a tournament where Centralia has a consuming interest in the outcome of the tournament.

I have always regarded Fred Gibson as one of the best basketball officials around and have not changed my opinion. And following the championship game at Granite City Friday night I talked to many coaches and fans, having learned after watching many games to distrust what I think I see (the angle of vision is too important) and to be always suspicious of my judgment, since I am neither an official nor a basketball coach.

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I talked to as many coaches Friday night and Saturday who felt the Madison-Belleville game was well officiated as I did with coaches whose opinion was the opposite.

All coaches agreed that the game was "called very tight" as one coach put it, and there was universal agreement that close, restrictive officiating would work to the disadvantage of Madison, which employs an aggressive, pressing defense.

MILT SPRUNGER, assistant to Al Willis, the executive secretary of the IHSA, attended the Granite City Sectional Thursday night, when Belleville played Litchfield, but had little comment on Madison's protests.

"I thought the officiating Thursday night was as good as I've seen and I saw no reason to remove him (Gibson) from the tournament," Sprunger said. "Both officials (Herb Scheller of Springfield worked with Gibson) received very high ratings for all the tournaments.

"I did talk with Mr. Palchelt (Madison principal John Palchelt) and Mr. McClanahan (Madison coach Earl McClanahan) and I thought our conversation was in confidence.

"I have no other comment to make on the thing."

MC CLANAHAN said he rated Gibson "as low as possible" for the regional tournament (held at Wood River).

(Coaches of teams involved in tournament play each list a number of officials who might be assigned to work that tournament. As nearly as possible the IHSA tries to assign to a particular tournament the two officials who receive the highest rating, taking into consideration, of course, that

the same two officials might be highly rated in other tournaments.)

"I was naturally surprised and angry when an official I had so many objections to was assigned to the sectional," McClanahan added.

McClanahan, Palchelt and Madison school board member John Belleff agreed that Madison was promised by Sprunger that Gibson, assigned to officiate the final eight games at Champaign, would not work any game involving Madison.

Sprunger would not comment on this Madison statement.

It goes without saying, however, that the state finals mean nothing until the sectional tournament is over. And if Madison's case against Gibson is good enough to have him removed from "possible" games at Champaign, it certainly is good enough to have Gibson removed from the sectional tournament.

OBVIOUSLY, the IHSA cannot be placed in the position of having its decisions overruled at the whim of coaches or school officials, but Madison had a substantial case against Gibson and the feeling here is that Madison did not get its day in court, as it were, and feels its loss to Belleville in the sectional tournament, with starter Don Freeman out, nearly half of the game, was tantamount to highway robbery.