

Fifty-cent rise is resulting in attendance drop



Storm of protest greets Sectional ticket hike

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When the Section VI Federation announced a rate increase of 50 cents in the per ticket cost to attend Sectional sports events about a month ago, only a few voices were raised against the move.

Since the Sectional tournaments began less than two weeks ago with the new rate in effect, however, the outcry against the new policy has steadily grown.

The din reached a new peak Monday night at a meeting of the Niagara-Wheatfield Board of Education where a storm of protest arose over the cost of attending the Class AA wrestling meet held Saturday, Feb. 24, at Niagara-Wheatfield High School.

In meets with more than eight teams competing, the Sectional quarter-finals are held Friday nights, with the semi-finals Saturday afternoon and the finals the same evening. With only eight teams in that AA meet, however, the quarter-finals and semi-finals were both held Saturday afternoon.

The problem developed when the Section officials decided to charge the now-standard price of \$1.50 per person to attend each segment of the preliminary competition.

As a result, the N-W gym had to be cleared in the brief interlude following the quarter-finals, with all spectators planning to view the semis being forced to pay another \$1.50 admission.

Later the same evening, much of the same crowd returned to view the finals at the cost of an additional \$2, resulting in a

total expenditure of an even \$5 to watch one day's proceedings.

Due to the high interest in wrestling in the N-W area, the gym was filled to near capacity throughout the meet despite the high fees. Other tournaments weren't so lucky: At Kenmore West, site of the Class AAAA meet which covered two days, many fans simply refused to pay the prices, resulting in one of the smallest crowds in the history of the tournament.

By the time Niagara-Wheatfield school board members got together for their regular meeting Monday, their ears were ringing with protests from their constituents. Their remarks at the meeting were far different from the week before, when they had approved the rate increase without too much furor.

School board vice president Steven Magyer termed the increase "utterly ridiculous," while board member Ronald Brown asserted, "They're driving people away from the Sectionals."

Moments later, the board unanimously rescinded its approval of the increase and voted to make its objections known at the next meeting of Section VI officials.

"I'll hand-deliver the protest myself," Schools Supt. Harold R. Snyder told the school board.

Meanwhile, Wednesday morning, Kenmore East varsity wrestling coach Skip Pine, chairman of the Niagara Frontier League wrestling coaches and a member of the Western New York Board of Wrestling Coaches, also voiced disapproval of the increase, especially concerning Sectional competition in wrestling.



"It's a little different with other sports, such as basketball and swimming, since they're a one-shot deal," he explained. "In those sports, you just pay once and you're done."

"With us, it's different, as you could see out at Niagara-Wheatfield. Just think how expensive that could turn out to be. Say a student — who gets no cut in price, by the way — wants to go and take his girlfriend. He could wind up spending 10 bucks in one day, and there's no way these kids have that kind of money."

"To carry it further, let's say a guy wants to take his family. With a wife and two kids, the whole shot will set him back \$20. I don't care how good the meet is, that's just ridiculous!"

Pine pointed out that things got even worse at the Section VI meet this past weekend at Sweet Home High School, where Sectional winners and runners-up competed for the right to represent this area in the State meet this weekend in Utica.

"They really cracked down at that one, only allowing the actual competitors and their coaches in free. That meant that boys who competed all year but didn't qualify for this meet had to pay to see their teammates trying to win the Sectional championship. As far as I'm concerned, that's doing a gross injustice to all those kids."

Meanwhile, over at the Sectional swim meet at Buffalo State College, cheerleaders were forced to pay the standard price of \$2 for the finals. In at least one case, involving the Lewiston-Porter cheerleaders, the squad's moderator had to write out a check in order for the girls to get in and cheer their own team.

Can anything be done about the problem?

Well, for starters, Pine disclosed that the WNY Board of Wrestling Coaches will take up the matter at its next meeting. This board, however, has no official capacity, so the best it will be able to do is make some kind of informal presentation to the Section's executive committee asking for a change in policy.

"If the people want to make their feelings known," said Pine, "they'd probably have the most success writing to Dan Hagen, President of Section VI." (You can write to Hagen at Eden High School, 3150 Schoolview Rd., Eden, N.Y. 14057.)

"In my opinion," Pine concluded, "the purpose of high school sports is to entertain, not to make money, and they're intended mainly for the kids."

"When things get so bad that the students can't even afford to pay the price of admission, something has got to be done."

Detroit gains a point