

## **It's Tough To Stay Awake In Class**

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On Feb. 10, a high school basketball game featuring the top two boys' teams in the state started at 8:41p.m. Hopewell's team, ranked No.1, left Vance's gym, after an exhilarating 70-62 win, just before 11 to take a bus back to campus.

By the time the players got home and ready for bed, it was going to be after midnight.

This season, many games, like Hopewell-Vance, increasingly started – and ended – later.

“I've got homework to do and on game nights, a lot of times, you can't do it after school. You have to wait until you get home after the game,” said Hopewell guard Brandyn Curry, a 4.6 student who has signed with Harvard. “It's tough to stay awake in class.”

About 10 years ago, Mecklenburg County principals changed from playing three games at one gym and junior varsity boys at another to playing four games at one site.

Principals thought that by combining games, they could save on expenses.

Until last season, the JV games were played with running clocks, except during the final two minutes of the second and fourth quarters. Before the 2007-08 season, JV coaches asked to remove the running clock in exchange for shortened warm-up and halftime sessions.

In some cases, it's working fine. Myers Park athletics director Greg Clewis said his school has made a point to enforce 10-minute breaks between games and halftimes – five minutes shorter than some schools. His goal is to be done by 9:30 each night.

“I know you'll have something from time to time,” Clewis said. “You'll have a girls' overtime or something like that, but if kids leave the gym at 10:30, then you've got an issue.”

Most CMS teams are mainly playing in Charlotte. In neighboring counties like Cabarrus, late game times, plus long bus rides, can be a bad mix.

Concord boys' coach Scott Brewer has had games start as late at 8:50 more than an hour's bus ride from campus.

“That teacher who coaches is so fatigued that they're affecting 90 to 100 kids because they're too dad-gum tired to teach,” Brewer said. “So it's video day or worksheet day, especially for somebody who teaches, say, English or Chemistry. And even a PE teacher will just sit on their can and roll the balls out.”

Cabarrus County School Board member Wayne Williams said county principals were recently asked if they would like to continue playing four games at one site. Two principals voted to split the games. Six voted not to maintain status quo.

“It makes a whole lot more sense to play JV at one school and varsity at another,” Williams said. “Then you don't have possibility of starting varsity boys too late. Usually this doesn't affect girls teams because when they get done playing, they get on the bus and go home.”

In Union County, teams play four games at one site, but the JV has seven-minute quarters, down one from the norm.

In Wake and Guilford counties, teams either play the JVs at a different site or split games up by boys and girls.

In Gaston County, teams play four games at one site, but the JV plays with a running clock, stopping in the final two minutes of each quarter – a version of CMS' old policy.

“Our games are over by 9, 9:30,” said East Gaston athletics director Ken Howell.

At last week's Hopewell-Vance game, the fourth quarter started at 9:37.

“We need to get (kids) home earlier,” CMS school board member Joe White said. “Some years ago, when boys were at home, girls traveled and that interfered with wrestling. But I would say now as both a grandparent and a school board member, we need to figure this thing out.”

Next fall, CMS schools will be reorganized into new conferences, whose officials will meet in May. Vicki Hamilton, the CMS system AD, said one of the agenda items for that meeting are these late games.

Myers Park's Clewis estimates that if CMS played JV and varsity games at separate sites, for example, there would be no additional bus costs, but schools would add about \$400 per night for game staffing.

Hamilton said schools would work hard to find a good solution.

“I've been in gyms this year where I looked at the clock and it's 10:40, and that's difficult when our student-athletes have to travel back to the home school, get in their parents' car and drive home and take care of academic work, and then be back at school at 7a.m. So we're going to get our heads together and see what we can come up with that can reduce the length without stepping on the integrity of the basketball games.”