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## NIU planning bid to host IHSA football championships

The IHSA is accepting bids for the state football finals, and Northern Illinois University will look at sending one in, Huskie Stadium director John Gordon and NIU athletic director Jeff Compher said Thursday.

"I think we're more in the exploratory process," Gordon said. "There are several different factors we have to look at: availability with the athletic department, use for that, and then most importantly what kind of community and local support we can garner up.

"That was very positive for us last time (2006-07), and I anticipate it will be that way this time as well."

The University of Illinois has hosted the state championship games at Memorial Stadium since 1999, but changes to the Big Ten schedule forced the IHSA to find a host for title games in odd-numbered years starting next year. The site proposal specifications seek a host for five seasons (2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2021).

Gordon said a committee would be formed to explore the bid specifications in the next two weeks. Compher said the bid is something he anticipates NIU doing, and that it's a question of whether or not the university can meet the bid specifications.

"If we can meet those specifications, I'm sure that we would, as a university, love to host this," Compher said. "I think it would be an outstanding opportunity for our community as well."

The bid specifications call for a minimum seating requirement of 12,000 seats, an artificial turf field and locker/training facilities. Huskie Stadium meets those requirements – the stadium officially holds 24,000, compared to 60,600 at Memorial Stadium – and a plan is in place to build an 83,500-square-foot indoor practice facility with a full football field next to the stadium, which could help NIU's bid.

"I think that's huge for us. You kind of need a place to warm up as they run these games through," Compher said. "To have a place for teams to warm up in preparation to take the field so they can keep the schedule going, I think that's a big deal."

The proposal specifications also call for a minimum of 50 seats for working media, plus a separate media work area and hospitality room fitted with TV monitors and workspace accommodations.

Gordon said Debbie Armstrong, the executive director of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau, will be an asset in any potential bid from NIU. Gordon also is listed as a director for the bureau.

"Debbie Armstrong has got the DeKalb County CVB," he said, "and I think that will be a real plus for us to have them so active now."

The deadline for submission is April 2. The IHSA board is scheduled to act on the proposals by June 11.

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