

## Cougar mats club cashing in on NAIA tourney

Written by Mike Deupree

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The arrival of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics wrestling tournament in Cedar Rapids later this week means some extra work for members of the Kennedy High School Parent Wrestling Support Club, as well as extra money for the club treasury.

“We’ll have 35 to 40 volunteers per session,” said club president Mike Sheldon. The workers will be responsible for keeping track of the written scorebook, the score clock and riding time. They also will serve as floor managers and assist as necessary with computer equipment. The tasks are similar to those the club handled for AAU youth tournaments for several years. Those tournaments have since moved to Des Moines.

The NAIA tournament has five sessions spread over Thursday, Friday and Saturday. It’s the first time the tournament will be held in Cedar Rapids, but not the first visit to Iowa. It was held in Sioux City from 2005-2008. The organization expects 5,000 to 8,000 spectators will attend. The tournament’s official host is Mount Mercy University, but the Kennedy boosters will be working for the event facility.

“We were contacted by the U.S. Cellular Center, based on the work we did for the AAU tournament,” explained Sheldon. This is the first year of a two-year contract. The NAIA tourney is scheduled to return to Cedar Rapids next year, although the arena likely will be unavailable because of a refurbishment project that is scheduled to begin in August and take about 14 months.

The center is paying the club a lump sum for the work, although Sheldon declined to be specific about the amount.

“We’d like to keep that (information) within the club,” he said.

The return of the fundraising opportunity is welcome. Since the AAU tournament left town, Kennedy boosters’ principal source of income has been using stencils to paint a large cougar head on the driveways of fans who ask for the decoration.

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The funds raised are used to send wrestlers to camps or purchase equipment. Last year, for instance, the club bought high-quality exercise bicycles.

“Basically, it’s anything that will help make our wrestlers better,” Sheldon said.

The NAIA comprises about 300 smaller colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada and is competitively similar to NCAA Division II. Iowa members that field wrestling teams are Briar Cliff, Grand View, Morningside, Northwestern, William Penn and Waldorf.