

Iowa prep baseball needs changes

Written by Mark Dukes

Sunday, 06 March 2011 18:54 - Last Updated Tuesday, 08 March 2011 07:52



The signs are there. A brilliant Sunday of sunshine. The first sighting of robins chirping in the trees. Snow evaporating. One week remaining in the “winter” high school sports season.

As the calendar flips to March each year, the anticipation of spring and summer begins. Certain events bring the favored seasons closer – Daylight Savings Time, St. Patrick’s Day, Easter and so on. Weather in the next couple months can be unpredictable but is largely tolerable. Knowing what’s around the corner this time of year is a good thing.

Soon after the boys state basketball tournament concludes this week, the focus of Metro area athletes will turn in earnest to the spring sports seasons of track and field, soccer, tennis and golf. Athletes are finally back outside ... running, throwing, and competing.

For all that is good about that, the step-child of Iowa high school sports still is two months away from surfacing. Iowa high school baseball doesn’t begin competition until late May and is gone seemingly before it gets rolling. Iowa is unique in that regard, which isn’t a good thing in my mind.

Whereas football and basketball have continued to be strong in involvement and fan participation over the years, baseball in many places has taken a back seat. Most of the baseball season takes place when school is not in session, which lessens student body support. Many baseball players also find themselves torn between being on the diamond or training for another sport or finding a job.

I would like to see a couple changes in Iowa high school baseball, but I’m not about to hold my breath waiting for them to happen.

Lengthening the season on the front end – starting games in early May -- would be good for the teams and players. Youths and colleges are playing games long before May Day. But there are those who would balk because some baseball players also are involved in spring sports. The

Iowa prep baseball needs changes

Written by Mark Dukes

Sunday, 06 March 2011 18:54 - Last Updated Tuesday, 08 March 2011 07:52

tussle there probably would be prohibitive.

The return to usage of wooden bats also would be interesting. Aluminum, or composite, bats have been in use for several decades. Originally, cost was a factor in doing away with wooden bats. Composite bats, although more costly at the outset, would last longer and be more financially prudent for the schools in the long run.

But composite bats have tainted baseball, from youths to colleges. The top 20 season batting averages in Iowa high school baseball history are .598 or better. That's an ungodly average and it's due mainly to the bats and not to inferior pitching. A generation of ballplayers rarely, if ever, has picked up a wooden bat.

The National Federation of State High School Associations, the governing body of prep sports on a national level, took a step in the right direction last summer when its baseball rules committee banned bats with composite barrels. Because of a moratorium, some composite bats will be allowed for use in the upcoming season. But the majority have been outlawed.

Nothing against track, soccer, tennis and golf, but it is times like this that turn a man's attention to baseball. Despite my feelings, the game will be played this year the same as last – beginning in late May, ending in July and all to the tune of the ping of composite bats. So be it. I'll still look forward to it.