

Football for a great cause

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I had a chance last Friday to attend one of the most inspirational luncheons of the year.

It was the annual lunch hosted by the El Kahir Shrine for the players and cheerleaders who will be participating in the annual Shrine Bowl football game this July in Ames. It's a good time for both families and the media to get together and talk about the football season that was, but it's much more than that.

As most sports fans in Iowa know, the Shrine Bowl helps to raise funds for Shriners Hospitals for Children, which are dedicated to helping kids with debilitating illnesses and diseases. Each year most of the top football players around the state suit up to play one final high school football game before they head off to college, or whatever direction they are headed. Over the last several years cheerleaders have been added to the mix to lend a hand to make this a truly special night.

But the big winners are the kids in the hospitals who are helped by the money raised for this game. When you walk into the luncheon, you immediately see pictures of the smiling faces of these kids who look up to these players and cheerleaders. The motto of the game says it all: "Strong legs run so that weak legs may walk." There is a great sense of responsibility for everyone associated with the game.

Each year the kids, and even the coaches, say the best part about the week of camp leading to the game is the annual trip to the Twin Cities to visit the kids in the Shriners Hospitals. It puts a face to the cause and sets in stone that idea of responsibility and commitment.

This year, four Metro players get to take part in this great honor, and each is very deserving to be called a Shrine All Star. They are: Ross Ellsworth from Kennedy, Dusty Albaugh of Marion, Chase Kloefer of Xavier and Jer Garman of Linn-Mar.

They are the latest to take up the torch that has been passed down to them by past generations, playing for those smiling faces who someday hope to be out of a hospital bed so they, too, may be able to run.