

Friday Nights Lost

Written by Scott Unash

Tuesday, 03 May 2011 16:24 - Last Updated Wednesday, 04 May 2011 23:59



There was once a much simpler time; before the internet and social networking took over and television sports became big business ... and big money. You remember it, don't you? College football was played on a Saturday afternoon -- and at 1 p.m. no less -- unless your team was one of just a hand-full that was chosen for a television game.

And Friday nights were for high school football. Period.

Books have been written about it and television shows have been created about it, the allure of high school football around this great nation. And it certainly is no different in Iowa. Fans from big schools to small towns flock to fields and stadiums to watch the great game played under the lights in their community, cheering on their neighbors, friends and, in some cases, heroes.

Friday night was high school football.

Then television people wanted to increase their bonanza of money coming from televising the sport. They envisioned, if we can make money on Saturday's, why not put games on other nights of the week? Not much was thought about this until the first Friday night games were played. Then we thought, well this will never happen here.

We were wrong. In 2005 Iowa State announced they would play at Army on a Friday night in September. Then Coach Dan McCarney was lukewarm about the idea, knowing it was infringing on sacred ground. Then Athletic Director Bruce Vandevelde agreed to the game to help out the coffers of the ISU athletic program. After the game, McCarney said ISU would not play another Friday night game under his watch.

He was a man of his word. However, Iowa State is not.

Friday Nights Lost

Written by Scott Unash

Tuesday, 03 May 2011 16:24 - Last Updated Wednesday, 04 May 2011 23:59

Here we are again after it was announced earlier this year that Iowa State would be involved in another Friday game, this time at Connecticut in September. For a sizable payday from ESPN, Iowa State will again disregard the fact that Friday nights are for high school football and the weekly community celebration surrounding the game. Perhaps the thinking was that we could look forgiveness at this Friday game as a necessary evil for an athletic department that needs all the cash it can get in these tough economic times? I can accept that.

But, then they did it again.

ISU agreed to a *second* Friday night game for the year, this one in November at Oklahoma State, for another healthy check from ESPN. AD Jamie Pollard is quoted as saying it is not a problem because there is no regular season high school football that night. He's right. It's the night of the Class 4A state championship! While the game will not interrupt games for the vast majority of the teams around the state, it will cause fans in this state to make a choice. Many fans, coaches and players come to the UNI-Dome each November to watch the finals. Now they will have to choose.

Back in 2005, more than half of the Cyclone football radio affiliates carried high school football on the Friday night of the Army game, including 1600 AM. We will do the same this year for the UConn game. And talking with other affiliates around the state, most also will opt for their local prep game on that Friday. And if we have a Metro team in the championship game on that Friday night in November, you can bet we will be at the Dome in Cedar Falls instead of T. Boone Pickens' lavish stadium in Stillwater, Okla.

I know times are tough. Athletic departments need all the cash they can bring in to make ends meet to help out the bottom line. I also realize that Iowa State isn't the only NCAA school that has opted for Friday night games. But to schedule a second Friday night game was, in my opinion, turning their backs on prep football in Iowa.

Now, maybe with that cash coming in we can look at bringing baseball back to Ames! But that's

Friday Nights Lost

Written by Scott Unash

Tuesday, 03 May 2011 16:24 - Last Updated Wednesday, 04 May 2011 23:59

a different subject for another day.

(Scott Unash is the sports and program director at KGYM-AM 1600. He is a six-time winner of the Iowa Broadcast News Association play-by-play Announcer of the Year Award. Scott and Mark Dukes co-host the Gym Class weekdays from 2-3 p.m. on KGYM)