

## Marion saved day for state volleyball

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 05 November 2014 18:30 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 November 2014 20:42

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If you've never attended the state volleyball tournament at the U.S. Cellular Center, do yourself a favor and stop by next week.

You'll be glad you did.

You do not have to be a volleyball fan to enjoy the tournament. You don't even have to know the teams, although watching the Marion Indians will be an added bonus.

If you like sports and competition, you'll enjoy the state volleyball tournament for its sheer athletic excellence. The jumping ability and reflexes of these girls is a pleasure to behold.

I remember the first time I was assigned to cover the state tournament. Volleyball, I remember thinking? You've got to be kidding. That's something you play at family picnics.

I went to the U.S. Cellular Center, kicking and screaming, and actually enjoyed myself. It's a remarkable sport with some truly remarkable athletes.

The tournament will be held next Tuesday through Friday, with all five championship matches scheduled for Friday. That would be a great day to camp out in downtown Cedar Rapids.

Congratulations to Marion for making the Class 4A tournament. The Indians have a truly talented team and will represent the Metro area in a first-class manner.

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It's a shame, however, that none of the other Metro teams made the field. Kennedy, Prairie, Xavier and Jefferson all lost in the regional finals Tuesday night, one victory away from reaching the state meet.

Linn-Mar would have been a good representative as well, but the Lions lost a five-set heartbreaker to Kennedy in the regional semifinals.

This was a very good year for volleyball in the Metro. Not a great year, but very good.

Marion is ranked No. 3 in Class 4A and a threat to win the title, especially if Abby Phillips' doctor thinks she can discard all that packing on her broken hand and get on the court. It's not likely, but Coach Roxanne Paulsen has not ruled it out.

Kennedy, Linn-Mar, Prairie and Xavier were all ranked at different times this season and posted some significant victories. Kennedy finished with a 28-12 record, Linn-Mar went 27-12, Prairie was 23-14 and Xavier finished 18-19.

The Jefferson J-Hawks finished with a 16-22 record, but they were vastly improved and a dangerous club behind Amanda Ollinger's wicked kill shots.

There was an impressive array of talent on display in the Metro area this season. And for a good number of them, they'll continue their volleyball careers at a high level in college.

Phillips is headed to Iowa State. Amanda Sahm, another of the star players at Marion, will be playing next year at Gardner-Webb.

Sarah Renner of Linn-Mar is headed to Georgia State. Kayla Torson of Xavier will be joining the team at Nebraska-Omaha. Keke Pledge of Jefferson, who missed the end of the season for medical reasons, is headed to Kirkwood.

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Kate Busswitz of Prairie, who is just a junior, has committed to the University of Northern Iowa. And there's no doubt Ollinger would have gotten a volleyball scholarship, but she's decided to play basketball for the Iowa Hawkeyes.

The list of college commitments will continue to grow as more talented players make their decisions in the next few weeks and months.

If you'd like to see your daughter get a college scholarship, you might want to steer them onto a volleyball court at an early age. It seems to be paying off.

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