

4 million reasons to give thanks

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 27 November 2014 18:16 -



The Metro Sports Report hit a major milestone last Friday when we passed 4 million page views since the website was launched in 2011, and it got me thinking about the work we do in our community.

Most of the stories we write are about the games and the people who play them at the eight Metro high schools, the three colleges in Cedar Rapids, the Kernels and the RoughRiders, although once in awhile we'll stray beyond those borders and write something about the Iowa Hawkeyes or offer a tribute to the late, great Johnny Orr.

None of us at the MSR knew Danny DeBacker, the former Mount Mercy University basketball player and track athlete who was tragically killed by a drunk driver Sept. 28 in Davenport.

We just began covering Mount Mercy in August, so we never saw him perform for the Mustangs last year, but once we heard about the tragedy we tried our best to tell people what happened and to write something about him. These are difficult stories to write and reminded me of writing about Chris Street's tragic death in 1993 when I was covering the Iowa Hawkeyes for The Gazette.

Jake Misener, a Kennedy High School grad and one of DeBacker's teammates at Mount Mercy, spoke eloquently about Danny when he called to speak with us that Sunday in September, just a few hours after DeBacker was pronounced dead at the University of Iowa Hospitals & Clinics. We wrote the best story we could about somebody we'd never met, but apparently it touched a lot of people.

We have written thousands of stories for the Metro Sports Report website since we launched our service on Jan. 3, 2011, and according to our Google analytics the story we wrote about Danny DeBacker has received the fifth-most number of hits in company history. I never would have expected or predicted that, but it shows the impact of the written word, especially when people are hungry for news.

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I hope I never have to write another story about a young athlete who has been tragically killed, but the chances are it will happen again someday.

It's the world we live in and bad stuff happens to good people.

Our story about former Cedar Rapids Jefferson basketball star Jarrod Uthoff leaving the University of Wisconsin ranks No. 1 all-time on our list of most popular stories. In particular, this was the story we broke on April 16, 2012 about Wisconsin Coach Bo Ryan adding all of the Athletic Coast Conference schools to the "banned" list of teams that could legally contact Uthoff about transferring.

We've had a series of other well-read stories along the way, including many that broke new ground. We broke the story about former Linn-Mar wrestler Joel Northrup refusing to wrestle a girl at the state tournament due to his religious beliefs, and we played a prominent role in covering the investigation into former Cedar Rapids Washington coach Tony Lombardi that ultimately led to him being stripped of his coaching license.

We've posted numerous feature stories about high school athletes in our community by some very talented writers, and on this special holiday when family and friends gather it reminds us of how much we miss Sher Jasperse, a gifted member of our team who passed away this past year.

The Metro Sports Report has been a labor of love for many of us. I've been a sports journalist for 40 years now, and I can honestly say it's the most fun I've ever had in my career. The response by our community has been phenomenal and truly rewarding. We never imagined we'd reach so many people in such a relatively short period of time.

We've carefully increased the number of schools and teams we cover the last four years, always wanting to make sure we could operate at a high level and provide a valuable service to our readers. The 4 million pageviews suggest we've succeeded.

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We began with the seven major high schools in the Metro area, then added Cedar Valley Christian in August of 2011 when the Huskies joined the state associations as their governing bodies. Since then we've added Kirkwood, the Kernels, the RoughRiders, Coe and Mount Mercy.

There's a good chance we're not done yet with our expansion plans. We have two projects in the works that we're excited about, but it's too soon to make any announcements.

At this time of Thanksgiving, I'd like to give thanks to all of you who have made the Metro Sports Report an important part of our community.

Let's lift a glass to the future and remember the past, including the good folks who are no longer here.