

## Metro calendar starts heating up Thursday

Written by Scott Unash

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Thursday marks the start of one of the busiest prep sports weeks on the Metro sports calendar.

The state track meet kicks off its three-day run at Drake Stadium in Des Moines on Thursday. Then, after a Sunday of rest, the "summer season" begins with the annual Bob Vrbicek Memorial Metro Baseball Tournament on Monday.

First the track.

It has been a time of great acclaim for the Metro over the past handful of years. Not only have the Washington boys captured the last two 4A championships, but we have had several Metro athletes win individual and relay titles during that span.

What will happen this year? Once again, the Metro should be well represented on the boys side. In fact, there are four teams that could end up in the top 10. Washington and Linn-Mar certainly have a chance to win the title. Prairie and Kennedy look to place high in the events they have qualified and could have a very successful weekend.

A team title is probably not in the cards on the girls side, but several individuals and relays are looking to bring home gold this weekend. And of course just outside the Metro, the Mount Vernon-Lisbon team will look to claim yet another championship.

Then on Monday the Boys of Summer take over the headlines. The year, as always, begins with the Metro Tournament. Several years ago the annual three-day tourney was named after Bob Vrbicek, one of the great umpires, coaches and supporters of both high school athletics and, in particular, high school baseball.

Verb, as he was known by, umpired many a game around the Metro and MVC along with his

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partner Lanny Peterson. They were simply the best duo around. They knew the game, they talked with you on the diamond and, most importantly, made all the players feel important. I had the privilege of being on the same field many times with these two gentlemen and I have never been around any better than Lanny and Verb.

Vrbicek also umpired many a Big Ten baseball game with partner Bill Quinby, and coached junior high baseball -- when that sport was offered -- at Taft.

As far as baseball in the Metro goes for this summer, it should be an interesting year.

Kennedy has to be looked at as the the top team and one of the state's favorites, based on its 4A title last summer. The Cougars have the top six batters in the order back from that squad to go along with a talented junior group. But they will be pushed.

One of the top pursuers will be the Prairie Hawks. On paper this looks to be Prairie's top group in several years with a lot of talent returning as well as a fine group of juniors moving up.

Jefferson and Xavier will always be in the mix. The J-Hawks have a very aggressive team that will score some runs and the Saints will rely on some seniors leaders that have been through the grind.

Linn-Mar has a couple of fine individuals to lead the way for the Lions, while a young Washington team will look to step up, especially without star pitcher Dakota Frese at the outset of the season. And of course, Marion will be one of the teams to beat in the Wamac West again this year for Coach Steve Fish. The Indians return many veteran all-around athletes that will lead them into battle this summer.

It will be fun and exciting. Do yourself a favor and head out on a beautiful summer night, have some popcorn and a brat, and enjoy some baseball!