

25 years for Linn-Mar and Prairie? Really?

Written by Scott Unash

Tuesday, 07 June 2011 21:55 - Last Updated Wednesday, 08 June 2011 01:23



Wow!

I received another dose of in-my-face reality Monday as I read the column of my colleague Mark Dukes. I almost fell off my chair when I read that next year will be 25 years since Linn-Mar and Prairie joined the Mississippi Valley Conference.

I still remember taking in what was the first football game for the Lions in the MVC, when they hosted Kennedy at Armstrong Field on a beautiful early fall night. It was beautiful for the Lions, anyway. They scored early and often in the win against the Cougars that night! That had to be one of the first MVC sports contests in Linn-Mar history, a history as Mark pointed out, that has been very good of late.

Let's not discount the Hawks either. Prairie has many banners on the gym wall celebrating both conference and state championships in various sports. It has been a very good thing for those two schools to have joined the MVC.

But what about the future?

We are looking at the big school class right now, and there is change rising from various parts of the state. It's not particularly a bad thing, but high school conferences are in a state of flux. Perhaps this change was kicked off by the IGHS AU announcement of the forming of a 5A Class, or perhaps it was inevitable even without this announcement. Anyway, let's review the facts and some rumors flying around out there.

First of all, we know there is a new high school coming to the North Liberty/Iowa City area in the near future. One would believe this school would be big enough for inclusion in the MVC, which would put the league at 15 schools, a tough number to manage and schedule. A 16-team league would be better, but how would that be? Could it be Western Dubuque, which was 4A this past year and looks to be staying in 4A because of increased enrollment figures?

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Or could the league shrink? There have been rumblings that the two Waterloo schools are not happy with the MVC and may be looking for an alternative. Cedar Falls, apparently, is happy with its place in the MVC. So how this plays out, who knows? One thing we do know is that there will not be an "even" north/south split of schools with any of these scenarios.

Around the state new 4A schools are popping up and that will change the landscape of the state's big school class. Ankeny will open a second school in the city in the next couple of years. Plans are being talked about for several other Des Moines suburbs to possibly open new high schools within the next 10 years. With the Central Iowa Metro League already at 18 members, something is bound to change among that group. They already have shifted their three divisions around beginning next fall.

There is talk of new conferences. In fact, one of the biggest rumors is the reformation of the once proud Big 8 Conference. This league included Waterloo West, East and Central (before it closed), Cedar Falls, Marshalltown, Fort Dodge, Ames and Mason City. The new Big 8 would not include all of these schools, but perhaps a few would look to raise this banner again.

Schools are getting larger, Dallas Center-Grimes and Norwalk are an example. And some schools are getting smaller, such as Indianola and Newton. One thing we know, the landscape of the big conferences around the state is going to look a lot different when Linn-Mar and Prairie celebrate their 35th Anniversary in the MVC.