

Great to see big crowd for prep football

Written by Jim Ecker

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A few days ago, we saluted the big crowd for the final game of the Midwest League playoffs between the Cedar Rapids Kernels and the West Michigan Whitecaps at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

It was a Monday night, there were no advance ticket sales and just about everyone had work or school the next morning.

Now it's time to salute the even bigger crowd that attended Friday night's football game between the Kennedy Cougars and Jefferson J-Hawks at Kingston Stadium. There's no way of putting an exact figure on the crowd, because of student passes and season-ticket sales, but I suggested there might have been 5,000 fans in the stadium that night and nobody in the press box disagreed.

Both sides of the stadium appeared to be about half-full, which is pretty good considering it's a big park. We had two good teams, good weather and two excellent marching bands, so the ingredients were all there for a nice turnout.

If you attend high school sports events on a regular basis, you know the crowds are usually on the smallish side. The home team might draw a good crowd, but the visitor's side is pretty skimpy. Not this time.

Kennedy has a 5-0 record, Jefferson has a competitive team with a 3-2 mark and the fans of both schools came out to support their teams instead of staying home and watching something dumb on TV.

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Kennedy dominated the game, 35-7, but nobody knew that would happen prior to kickoff. The Cougars were too big and too strong for the J-Hawks, but Jefferson will certainly win more games this season and probably make the playoffs.

The Cougars began last season with six straight losses, and they've begun this season with five straight wins. Imagine that: One of the longest losing streaks and one of the longest winning streaks have come in back-to-back years.

Kennedy had the look of a winner back in August, which is why we labeled them as possibly the "surprise" team for the 2015 campaign. It's nice to be right once in awhile, because my track record with predictions is pretty bad. For confirmation, just ask MSR photographers Margaret O'Banion and Ken Gilchrist about my predictions for big games, especially at state tournaments.

Kennedy has the ingredients to make a good run in the Class 4A playoffs. In fact, it would not be a surprise to see the Cougars face Bettendorf or Washington in the semifinals with a chance to meet one of the powerful West Des Moines schools for the title in the UNI-Dome.

That's getting a little ahead of ourselves, but it's always fun to look ahead. A rematch between the Cougars and Warriors would be great fun and would give Washington a chance to atone for its 28-24 loss to Kennedy earlier this year.

Washington rallied for a solid victory over Muscatine Friday night for an important victory in its district. And the Xavier Saints continued to roll along in Class 3A with a big win at Maquoketa.

Kennedy, Washington and Xavier will certainly make the playoffs this year. Jefferson, Prairie and Linn-Mar all have good shots as well. The new formula for making the playoffs does not go into effect until next season, so we'll still have 32 teams in each class for the playoffs this year. It's a bloated system, but at least it gives teams a shot at redemption.

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Kennedy made the playoffs last year and won a postseason game, despite its 0-6 start to the regular season. In fact, Kennedy's late-season push in 2014 helped set the stage for its fast start this year.

Here's hoping the local teams keep winning. And here's hoping the fans keep attending the games.

There should be another big crowd this Friday night when Kennedy visits Linn-Mar. Kennedy will certainly bring a nice crowd to Linn-Mar Stadium and the Lions have good fan support as well on their homecoming night.

Way to go, folks. The athletes deserve your support and they put on a good show.

Keep coming.