

The toughest game to predict

Written by Scott Unash

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Casual fans, parents and, yes, even media tend to commit two sports sins many times during the sports calendar year. The first being looking ahead in a team's schedule beyond the next game. The other being the act of comparing scores, to perhaps determine how a game should come out on the field.

You can't do either of those exercises for high school baseball.

There is *no* sport that involves more upsets and strange happenings, especially during the postseason, than high school baseball.

In football and basketball you can have the occasional upset, but more often than not (especially in football) talent usually prevails.

That is not the case in baseball. Just take a look at the state tournament fields over the past decade. Usually you can count the number of rated teams in the four classes on two hands. Teams that are considered "shoo-ins" at the beginning of the year, many times do not get a chance to prove their mettle at Principal Park in Des Moines.

Why is that?

The answer is pretty simple: Pitching.

Baseball is the one game where one individual controls the outcome of the game. Especially if they are "on" for that particular night. If a pitcher has his best stuff, and the defense behind him doesn't make errors, he can shut down even the most dangerous group of hitters. That is why you never, ever, automatically move a team ahead on the tournament trail before the game is played.

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The other big factor in baseball in general is the daily pitching matchups. Even though the Iowa High School Baseball Coaches Association does a great job publicizing their teams with weekly ratings, it is almost impossible to put them together because records can be deceiving. Many times a team will have their top starting pitcher going up against a team throwing its No. 4 or 5 pitcher. Rain outs forcing rescheduled games resulting in multiple doubleheaders can jumble a pitching staff for several weeks. In a perfect world each game would have an equitable pitching matchup, but this isn't a perfect world.

So the next time you look at the matchups in high school baseball for a particular day or night, and think to yourself, "Aah, that's a pair of wins for that team," think twice. You never know how the pitching rotation is playing out for both squads. Same thing when you look at the tournament trail over the next few weeks.

You can never pencil, or pen, a team into the next round.

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