

The stories of 2010-11 - No. 4

Written by Scott Unash

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As we come to the end of the 2010-11 high school sports year here in the Metro area, it seems like a good time to look back at the top sports stories, at least to this broadcaster.

This list is not right or wrong, and it certainly is open to interpretation. But looking back, I really believe these were the most interesting and intriguing stories of the past year.

I hope you enjoy.

No. 4 - Kennedy football's postseason run

Go back in time, if you would, to the spring of 2008. The Iowa High School Athletic Association confirmed what many coaches and administrators had been talking about for several months, that the IHSAA football playoffs would be expanding. Not only expanding but doubling!

At first most coaches were dead set against this move. The IHSAA was doing this only to make more money on their cash cow sport and the playoffs would be watered down by so many teams with losing records, was the thinking.

After awhile many of the coaches changed their minds and welcomed the expanded playoffs, 32 in each class as opposed to 16 schools in the past. We also knew that sometime in the future a team that had a less than stellar record during the regular season would jump up and have a great playoff run.

Little did we know it would be a Metro team that would be the first.

The Kennedy Cougars ended the regular season last fall with a 5-4 record and a fourth-place finish in the Mississippi Division of the MVC, despite starting the season at 0-3. The Cougars got hot at the right time. It wasn't as if this team didn't have talent. The group was very very successful as sophomores and had some top flight talent. Players such as Jed Haycraft, Anthony Crawley, Jake Losch, Herschel Dixon, Ryan Sheldon as well as the highly recruited Christian French, were a group to not be taken lightly on a Friday night. It was a team that just needed some momentum, and that momentum started the last month of the season and into the playoffs.

On a cold, raw, blustery Wednesday night the Cougars met their neighbors down 42nd Street, the Xavier Saints, at Saints Field. The Cougars jumped out early and avenged an opening week loss by upsetting the favored Saints by the unusual final of 11-7. Then it was another road test, this time driving to Eldridge to meet the 9-1 North Scott Lancers, the Mississippi Athletic Conference runner-up. North Scott was a confident and talented squad, but the rigors of the night-in-night out rough and tumble MVC helped out the Cougars and they prevailed 13-7.

Now it was down to eight teams in Class 4A, and one of those squads was the first to reach this level with four regular season losses in the short history of the expanded playoffs. For their reward of winning the first two games, the Cougars got a home game at Kingston Stadium against the unbeaten MAC champion Bettendorf Bulldogs. The Cougars came out and played a solid ballgame and had their chances to win, but in the end the Bulldogs won by a touchdown at 14-7.

The road had ended and Cinderella's shoe no longer fit, but the 2010 Kennedy Football team was the group that perhaps proved why the IHSA had moved to an expanded playoff format back in 2008. Back in the days before the expanded playoffs, this team would more than likely have been finished and playing for pride after week three since more often than not a squad needed six or seven victories to make the postseason. These kids got the opportunity to prove themselves and that's what they did. Someday there likely will be another "Cinderella team" that also will have four or five losses and go far in the playoff tournament, but the 2010 Kennedy Cougars were the squad that first made that trek.

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