

Opportunity for rare feat awaits Kennedy

Written by Mark Dukes

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Sustained excellence in high school sports is difficult to capture. Athletes and coaches often come and go. A bad break here or there can ruin an otherwise spectacular season. State championships are tough to come by.

This week, Kennedy's baseball team is seeking a repeat of a Class 4A state baseball state championship. You have to go back 60-some years to find another Metro area baseball program that has repeated at the state level, and that high school no longer exists. Wilson High School, now a middle school, won state championships in 1947 and '48 and again in 1950.

This is not to suggest there hasn't been excellent baseball in the Metro area. But if you're talking back-to-back state titles, the fraternity is very small.

Kennedy has done it in a variety of ways, most notably consistency in coaching. Bret Hoyer is at the helm now and he has consistently produced quality, if not championship teams. Before him, Bill Herkelman had solid programs year after year. The Cougars also have developed an excellent youth program that has served the high school squad well.

State championships are not the only measure of excellence, but they are the one common denominator for every school to achieve.

In recent times, the Xavier girls' soccer program has had the highest flying flag. The Saints have won an incredible six straight state titles, and there is no indication of any falloff.

In the history of the Metro area, Washington boys' swimming is king and may always be. The Warriors have won 27 state titles, including a run of 11 in a row. Once again, a crucial ingredient there was consistency in coaching with Hal Krizan building the program and Jim Voss perpetuating it.

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A distant second from a historical standpoint would be Marion's cross country teams under the direction of Les Hipple. The Indians won nine straight state championships between 1945 and '54 (no team totals were kept in 1947).

There are other programs in the Metro area that have done wonders, but not many in recent times. Linn-Mar boys' basketball program has advanced to the state tournament eight straight seasons, winning three state titles and finishing second twice.

Kennedy's baseball program has an opportunity to do something very special for a Metro area program. If they can win another state title, the Cougars will be the first repeat champion among the current Metro programs.

Being in a position to do so is one thing. Coming through would be unusually good.