

Cougars join elite teams in state history

Written by Jim Ecker

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DES MOINES - Cedar Rapids Kennedy High School has quietly become one of the most frequent visitors to the state baseball tournament in Iowa history.

The Cougars are tied with Mason City Newman for the most trips to the state tournament in the 21st Century, with both schools qualifying nine times since 2000.

In addition, Kennedy is tied with Bancroft St. John for the second-most trips to the summer state tournament during any 12-year span in history with nine trips apiece, according to research conducted by the Metro Sports Report. Norway tops that chart with 10 trips in 11 years from 1981 through 1991.

The Cougars qualified for the state tournament in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010 and again this year. Bancroft St. John made nine trips in 12 years from 1975 through 1986 and from 1977 through 1988.

The sixth-ranked Cougars (31-8) will face Fort Dodge 29-12) in the opening round of the Class 4A tournament on Wednesday at 6 p.m. at Principal Park in Des Moines.

Kennedy Coach Bret Hoyer credited the program's success to good players, top assistant coaches, a strong parent support group and a successful feeder system.

"Things have fallen into place for us," he said. "It's just the right time with some pretty talented players coming through here."

Hoyer also took the Cougars to the state tournament in 1993, giving him 10 trips in 19 years at Kennedy.

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Fort Dodge swept Kennedy, 9-3 and 8-3, in a doubleheader at Fort Dodge on June 11 when the Cougars were ranked No.1 in the state. Brad Lombard, who pitched a complete game in the opener against Kennedy that day, is expected to start for the Dodgers Wednesday night against Kennedy ace Austin Christensen.

Christensen (8-0) did not pitch against Fort Dodge this year.