

Metro prep sports heating up again

Written by Mark Dukes

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And, they're off ... at least officially.

Family vacations are in the books, hanging out with friends is down to a minimum and the dead period of activity in high school sports is over.

Another year of Metro area high school sports begins this week, even before school starts. Practice begins for football, boys and girls cross country, boys golf, girls swimming and volleyball. The first competition of 2011-12 is this week, with the Mississippi Valley Conference golf meet slated Thursday at Twin Pines in Cedar Rapids.

To be completely accurate, the new era of Metro high school sports actually began last week when Cedar Valley Christian School began practice for its inaugural season of eight-man football. The Huskies will play an abbreviated schedule this season, starting with a trip to Maynard to play West Central on Aug. 19.

There is quite a lot of newness to this season aside from CVC's addition to the Metro scene. Cedar Rapids Prairie has a new head coach in Mike Morrissey and a refurbished football stadium, complete with orange-painted end zones and field turf. It will be unveiled Aug. 26 when the Hawks entertain Washington.

Linn-Mar has a new stadium that already has been used for other sports, but the football team will make its first appearance there Sept. 2 when the Lions host Kennedy.

And, the state volleyball tournament this November will have a new site. The Cedar Rapids Ice Arena will host the 2011 tourney because the U.S. Cellular Center downtown is being renovated. The Center is under contract with the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union to host the event through 2015, and supposedly will be ready to resume doing so in 2012.

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So long, summer. Let the games begin.

LOW TRAVEL BUDGET – Linn-Mar will have to leave the Metro area only once this football season, that being a road trip to Dubuque to play Wahlert. Otherwise, the Lions will play four times at their new stadium, twice at Kingston Stadium and at Prairie and Xavier.

The other Metro teams in the MVC all have at least two road trips. Prairie and Washington both will use Interstate 380 twice, each with games at Iowa City High and Iowa City West.

METRO FLAVOR IN NFL? – Four former Metro area stars will be trying to make NFL rosters in the next few weeks.

Center Ben Lamaak (Cedar Rapids Kennedy) and tight end Allen Reisner (Marion) are in camps with the Oakland Raiders and Minnesota Vikings, respectively. Center Rob Bruggeman (Cedar Rapids Washington) has spent the past two seasons on the Atlanta Falcons practice squad and will be trying to earn a spot on the regular roster. Adrian Arrington (Cedar Rapids Washington) has a one-game career under his belt with the New Orleans Saints but has spent most of his career on their practice squad.

The list of former Metro area high school players who have competed in the NFL is relatively short. Kurt Warner (Cedar Rapids Regis) had a Hall of Fame-like career as a quarterback. Dedric Ward (Cedar Rapids Washington) had a solid career as a wide receiver. Carey Bender (Marion) played in one game as a running back with the Buffalo Bills.

A name usually lost in this type of discussion is Tom Farmer, a star at old Cedar Rapids Wilson. He spent three years in the NFL with the Rams and Redskins, scoring three touchdowns.

WONDERFUL WEEKEND – Watching sports is more fun when you know someone, and that was true this past weekend.

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Zach Johnson (Regis), fresh off his wonderfully successful fundraising event last week, had a terrific weekend at the Bridgestone Invitational and finished tied for sixth. Ryan Sweeney (Cedar Rapids Xavier) went 1-for-2 with an RBI and two walks for Oakland in its 5-4 win over Tampa Bay on Sunday.

Teenager Joey Gase (Xavier) had an excellent showing for himself in the NASCAR Nationwide race at Newton, finishing 20th after starting 32nd. And Landon Cassill (Cedar Rapids Jefferson) was solid again on the NASCAR Sprint Cup circuit. He led two laps at Pocono, albeit during recycling of pit stops. Landon placed 27th and was the first car one lap down at the finish.