

## It's all about the experience

Written by Mark Dukes

Monday, 03 January 2011 00:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 02 January 2011 20:41

---



Too big to be small, too small to be big. That is the best description I've come across of what has come to be known as "The Metro area."

I've been participating in local sports since the 1960s, playing in the Cedar Hills Booster Club baseball league and Junior City Amateur golf tournaments. I've been covering sports since the 1970s, back when Linn-Mar and Prairie were in the East Central Iowa Conference, LaSalle and Regis were among the eight Metro high schools, and six-player girls basketball was being introduced in town.

Athletes, coaches and conferences have come and gone. We tend to focus on the present day. But reflect for a minute and you realize how profoundly productive Metro area athletes have been.

This area has produced a Masters golf champion, a Super Bowl Most Valuable Player, a Wimbledon participant, major league baseball players, an NBA championship head coach, Olympic Games qualifiers and NCAA champions. What Metro area of fewer than 200,000 people can say that?

Yet for every Zach Johnson and Kurt Warner and Ryan Sweeney, there have been hundreds of youngsters who have toiled in relative anonymity. They have played for the love of the game, for the comraderie, for the challenge.

What Warner and the third-string quarterback have in common is something very simple: the high school experience. It is something that stays with you for life, whether you're Sweeney staring down major league fastballs or the athletically challenged basketball player who for once in her life just wanted to make the traveling squad.

## It's all about the experience

Written by Mark Dukes

Monday, 03 January 2011 00:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 02 January 2011 20:41

---

They'll all tell you, competing for your high school was a hoot. It was about coming out of the locker room and breaking through the sign the cheerleaders had made. It was about setting a PR, even though it didn't result in a victory. It was about sharing with your teammates in the joy of beating the cross-town rival. It was about seeing the 6 a.m. workouts pay off.

Sometimes, it all resulted in one day finding yourself on the top step of the NCAA wrestling tournament awards stand. More often, it resulted in the end of your athletic experience and moving on to "the real world." But the common thread was the experience.

If that all seems rather sappy, so be it. But it's largely true.

Just eavesdrop on a conversation among several old teammates at the class reunion. The argument is about who was the hero in the double-overtime win 20 years ago. The talk is about the time the deep reserve not only got on the court, but made a play. Maybe there's a recollection of some shenanigans that happened on the bus ride back home from Dubuque.

It's about the time you actually got to be interviewed on the radio by Bob Brooks. It's about the legendary pep talks in the dark locker room by Regis football coach Tom Good. It's about getting to go to The Barn in Des Moines for the state tournament.

It's about the pep assembly the day before the Jefferson-Washington game. It's about competing in your sport and going to prom on the same day. It's about deciding where the group is going for pizza after the game.

And then it's over. One day you're a gangly freshman trying to get rid of acne. Seemingly the next, you're sending out graduation invitations. Some will go on to greatness in college or professional sports. Most others will become teachers, truck drivers, plumbers and professors. But they all leave their high school with one lasting memory: the experience.