

The unsung heroes at our high schools

Written by Scott Unash

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Last Friday night the Iowa Hawkeyes met the Iowa State Cyclones in their annual men's basketball matchup.

Why it was played on a Friday -- a high school night -- is a subject for an entirely different column. But the fact that it was gave me the opportunity to take in a prep game as a spectator. It was a fairly cut-and-dry choice as to what game to attend.

Defending state champ Linn-Mar was playing host to Iowa City West in a great early season MVC showdown. The crowd was ready, both teams came out gunning, and then the entire complexion of the night changed in a heartbeat. Lions swingman Matt Lassen and a West player had a horrific collision under the basket. Lassen's head hit the floor and then hit the floor again after he was inadvertently struck by teammate Marcus Paige, who was going for the block on the shot.

I've seen many collisions like this over my 23 years of calling games, and I knew right away this was a bad one.

Lassen lay on the floor, not getting up. Immediately trainers, coaches and administrators rushed to Lassen's aid. Around an hour later another collision took place across town at Prairie involving Hawk guard Jacob Aune in the Hawks' game with Washington. Coincidentally, the same paramedics called to tend to Lassen were also called to care for Aune.

Watching the scene play out at Linn-Mar made me realize just how fortunate we are in the Metro area to have the level of care we do for our high school athletes. Each of the 4A schools has a trainer on staff to help the kids with anything from icing sore muscles to being emergency responders.

Having a son who is involved in sports, I know first-hand how important these men and women are to a school's athletic program. No matter what health care provider these trainers come

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from, they are knowledgeable, and well versed to perform in any situation. They are all to be commended.

Over the last few years, we have talked with both Bill Grudzinski and John Tomberlin on our Gym Class radio program on 1600 AM about the athletic trainers at the Metro schools. Both men have nothing but great things to say about the service that these people provide. And that was certainly shown last Friday night at the Linn-Mar gym, as well I'm sure over at Prairie.

Recognition should also go out to the coaches and administrators for their part in each situation. Their attention to detail and grace under pressure helped immeasurably for each of the athletes involved.

Both players went to area hospitals after the accidents. Aune was out of the hospital the next day and may get back to the court soon to help out the Hawks.

It will be a longer recovery for Lassen, but the good news is that he was discharged Tuesday from University Hospitals and Clinics in Iowa City. When he gets back to the court is secondary right now. What is important is that he also has a full recovery.

The outpouring of support for Lassen over the past several days also has been great. Coaches and players from Linn-Mar as well as Iowa City West and other MVC teams have visited him to check in on his progress and to wish him well. Those are the good sports stories you need to hear and read more about.

We never want to go through anything like what happened not once but twice last Friday evening. But it's very comforting to know that the athletes have great and well-trained personnel around in the case of injuries like this taking place.

(Scott Unash is the sports and program director at KGYM-AM 1600. He is a six-time winner of the Iowa Broadcast News Association play-by-play Announcer of the Year Award. Scott and Mark Dukes co-host the Gym Class weekdays from 3-4 p.m. on KGYM)