

## State titles have eluded C.R. public schools

Written by Mark Dukes

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Cedar Rapids public schools are in the midst of an almost inexplicable drought when it comes to winning state championships in football and boys basketball. And the thing is, their public school brethren in other Metro areas aren't in much better shape.

High schools in the Cedar Rapids Community School District – Jefferson, Kennedy and Washington – have gone 38 years without a state football title and 26 years since winning a state basketball championship. Jefferson is the only one among the three to win in football, that coming in the inaugural playoff derby in 1972. The last basketball titles for public school boys programs were in 1984 for Kennedy, 1969 for Washington and 1967 for Jefferson.

Why have those three schools struggled to win the big trophies in those two sports? It can't be happenstance if they are empty for the past two or three decades. Good programs exist elsewhere, and they are largely in those cities where there is only one public high school (i.e. Bettendorf, West Des Moines Valley, Ames, Ankeny).

There are exceptions, and the most noticeable is Iowa City, where City High has won four football titles in the past 20 years, West three. Each Iowa City school also has won at least one basketball title since 1990. Jefferson, Kennedy and Washington? Zero.

The possible explanations are many: facilities, talent pool, coaching, enrollment sizes, money, commitment to excellence, middle-school feeder programs, luck. Depending on the school, one or more explanations can apply.

Let's examine football for a moment.

Here are the state champions in Class 4A since 1990: Bettendorf (4), West Des Moines Valley (4), Iowa City High (4), Iowa City West (3), West Des Moines Dowling (3), Ankeny (1) and Cedar Rapids Xavier (1). Common threads here are those cities with one public school, and parochial schools. It also doesn't hurt that Valley's enrollment is 2,016 students, considerably

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more than Kennedy (1,379), Jefferson (1,251) and Washington (1,071).

Cedar Rapids isn't alone. No public schools in Des Moines or Waterloo have won a state football title since the playoff system started in 1972. Sioux City's last was 1984, Davenport's 1983, Dubuque's 1979. Why can't public school programs get over the hump these days?

Maybe it's a talent shift of some kind. In the Metro area, Linn-Mar has been the standard-bearer in football and basketball. The Lions have won three football championships in the last 25 years (1985, 1989, 1990) and two basketball titles recently (2004, 2007). Aside from Linn-Mar and Xavier, though, Metro 4A schools have made a combined 33 state football playoff appearances since 1990. It has two titles to show in that time (Linn-Mar 1990 and Xavier 2006).

Basketball's drought isn't quite as pronounced, but is still significant. Since Kennedy's championship in 1984, the three public schools have made 16 state trips without winning it all. Washington hasn't made it out of the first round since 1980. Jefferson was third in 1996. Kennedy has reached the semifinals four times in its five appearances since 1990.

Linn-Mar and Prairie are the only Metro schools to win state titles in that 20-year period, Linn-Mar in 2004 and 2007 and the Hawks in 1998. Statewide, public schools have had better success in basketball than in football. Des Moines (Hoover), Waterloo (East), Sioux City (East and West) and Davenport (West) all have had public-school state champions since 1990.

With only a few exceptions, the three Cedar Rapids public schools haven't done much the past three decades in other sports. Kennedy won a baseball title last summer and Washington did it in 1994, but otherwise nothing. Washington claimed a track title in 2009 but it was the first for a C.R. public school since the 1960s and '70s. The last wrestling crown for the three was in 1974 (Jefferson).

The Metro area is perhaps at an all-time high in individual basketball talent the past few years, with several players committing to Division I programs. And the public schools are among the top in the state polls this winter, with Jefferson, Kennedy and Washington all being ranked in the 4A Top 10 at one time.

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But will it translate to that elusive state title for a Cedar Rapids public school? Another year went by for the three football programs. Can it end in basketball?