

New group playing for great cause

Written by Scott Unash

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Last Friday I had the opportunity to attend the annual luncheon held by the El Kahir Shrine of Cedar Rapids for the football players, cheerleaders and families of the North team for the annual Shrine All-Star Game that will be played in Ames on July 21.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the game, and it still to this day reminds you of one of the highlights of the state's sports calendar.

This year, the Metro will be sending five players to suit up for the North squad, with Highway 30 as the unofficial dividing line between the north and south. Kennedy's Josh Jahlas, Linn-Mar's Mark Atwater, Marion's Jake McDonald, Xavier's Jordan Weber and Washington's Flynn Heald will be among the 46 players on this year's North team.

The players will be put through their paces for an eight-day period in July on the Iowa State campus and will have an opportunity to make life-long friends during the preparation for the game.

Again this year, the highlight of the week will be the annual trip to visit a Shrine Children's Hospital. The Shriners around the state and the country continue to provide care for children in need, free of charge.

Every year you hear of great stories being told by the players and the coaches about this trip. Sharing the day with children who aren't as fortunate suddenly puts many things into proper perspective for young men about to go off on their own for the first time in their lives.

The support that the Shrine Games around the country provide for these hospitals is one of the great stories in sports that you don't hear much about, but should.

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While the various Shrine Games around the country continue going strong, all the news, as we found out at this year's luncheon, is not great. The NCAA has passed a rule that will disallow non-collegiate games and activities from being held on Division I college campuses.

This is due mainly to the Shrine Games in the southern part of the country being held earlier in the school year during recruiting periods and some schools using the game to show off their facilities and to entice players to attend their school.

The Shriners of Iowa have appealed to the NCAA to allow this year's game once again to be played at Jack Trice Stadium in Ames on the Iowa State campus. The Shriners are hoping that since the game is to be played in late July, and most students have already made their college choice, they will get a waiver to play in Ames.

They are confident, but it is not a sure thing, and they have made several contingency plans in case the NCAA rules against them. The annual game at one time was on a rotating basis between Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Sioux City and Davenport.

Many of the Shrine Games were held at Kingston Stadium, and I'm sure the Cedar Rapids Community School District, if asked, would again welcome the Shrine Game with open arms.

If you have a chance to attend the game, I highly encourage you to do so. If you can't make it and have the opportunity to help out in some way, please do. You will be helping out with a great cause, and helping one of the great sports traditions in the state.

(Scott Unash is the sports and program director at KGYM-AM 1600 (FM 106.3). 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-AM 1600 and FM-106.3)