

Baseball of yesteryear

Written by Scott Unash

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I was driving past Noelridge Park earlier this week on Collins Road, when I briefly looked over to the many fields that populate the park. A pair of the diamonds were being used by kids.

Kids without uniforms.

Kids that, accompanied by a pair of supervisors, were just out playing baseball ... and by the look of things, just for the fun of it.

It reminded of my youth, and simpler times.

It reminded me of growing up here in the Metro area and learning the game and having fun with my friends.

Times that, for good or for bad, have left probably never to return.

That's not a bad thing. Kids are now growing up getting terrific instruction and playing the game they love in a different manner. Instead of playing kids that live down the street, they play kids from another county or another state. The kids that are coming up through the ranks are for the most part better, faster and more skilled.

But sometimes I wonder if today's kids are missing out.

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Growing up in the 70's, there were four major youth baseball organizations here in the Metro: Cedar Rapids Kid League, Hiawatha Kid League, Cedar Hills Kid League and the Prairie Kid League.

Here's how it worked. You signed up for your age group, you waited, and you found out what team you were playing for. You then called all of your friends to see if they were on your team or a rival group.

It was all up to chance, there was no assembling of super teams or the like. You played with the hand you were dealt. You practiced for a few weeks and then the games started. You played around 15 to 20 games and that was it. You moved on to the next season and the next sport, usually football ... after the family vacation, of course.

The most memorable part about the summer, though, would be the camaraderie built up with your neighbors, or your classmates, or kids in other neighborhoods you would bump into on occasion.

I remember how the typical day would play out. Get up in the morning, call your friends, and get together to play games outside. Whether it be Wiffle Ball, "Indian Ball" or some type of baseball activity, you would play throughout the morning, break for lunch and go at it again.

You would only stop early if there was a game or practice that night that you thought would never arrive, because time would go so slowly waiting for the first pitch. That's the way it went for us in Hiawatha Kids League. Our friends in the Cedar Rapids Kid League would go the opposite way. They played and practiced in the morning and then played into the night time hours.

When we all would get together for "big games", we would all talk of how our team or our league could beat the other. It wasn't mean or "trash talk", it was just good fun.

Those days are for the most part gone. While the Hiawatha Kid League is still in good shape, I don't believe there is an organized CR Kid League today. Cedar Hills is still going strong and I

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see many kids still playing out at Prairie around the school on their diamonds. Many kids now play in USSSA, with most of them starting around the age of seven, some even younger. USSSA is a terrific way to teach kids the game of baseball. In fact, both of my sons played USSSA ball and had a terrific time. However, they both started out their first year in the Hiawatha Kid League playing Tee-Ball and learning to love the game the way that I did.

Whatever path your kids choose to take, have fun with the game. Teach them the right way to participate in sports and make sure they have fun. It's something they hopefully will remember and pass on to their own kids someday.

Now ... if only we can do something about getting the kids outside playing during the rest of the day instead of sitting inside watching and playing video games!

(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)