

Metro teams blanked in boys basketball poll

Written by Jim Ecker

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The good folks who vote in the Associated Press boys basketball poll don't think too highly of the Metro teams from Cedar Rapids and Linn-Mar.

At this point, it's hard to blame them.

The initial AP rankings were announced Monday and there are no Metro teams in the Top 10 of the Class 4A poll. The Linn-Mar Lions came close, but missed by a few votes.

It's a far cry from just two years ago, when Linn-Mar, Jefferson, Kennedy and Washington were clustered in the Top 10 with strong clubs and outstanding players. The Lions, J-Hawks and Warriors all made the state tournament, and Linn-Mar went wire-to-wire as the No. 1 team and captured the 4A title with a 24-0 mark.

The Marion Indians also had a strong team that year and made the Class 3A state tournament.

All of the stars from those teams are gone now, many of them to major colleges.

Marcus Paige (North Carolina), Josh Oglesby (Iowa) and Matt Bohannon (Northern Iowa) are playing Division I ball now. Wes Washpun played a year at Tennessee, then transferred to Northern Iowa and is being redshirted. Jarrod Uthoff took a redshirt year at Wisconsin, then transferred to Iowa and has to redshirt again due to NCAA rules.

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Taylor Olson and Kasey Semler are playing at Kirkwood Community College, hoping to land at four-year schools themselves some day. Matt MacDougall has joined Northern Iowa as an invited walk-on with a promising future.

There are numerous other recent Metro grads who are playing for NCAA schools, NAIA teams and junior colleges -- too many to mention here.

It could be a long time before the Metro reaches those heights again in terms of talented individuals and talented teams. It might never happen again. It may have been unique, never to be seen again.

That doesn't mean there aren't some talented players and talented teams around this season. And it doesn't mean the Top 10 will be forbidden territory for Metro clubs during the 2012-13 campaign.

Linn-Mar is off to a 1-1 start and always has fundamentally sound players, thanks to a premier feeder system and terrific coaches at the high school level. Matt Lassen has committed to play Division I basketball at Albany (N.Y.) next season, and Jimmy Roth has signed a Division II scholarship with Upper Iowa.

Roth has been serving a suspension to begin the season and has not played yet, but he'll give the Lions a big boost when he returns and joins Lassen as perhaps the best 1-2 punch in the Metro.

Derik Gogg is an experienced 6-foot-8 center for Linn-Mar, giving them an inside presence. And freshman Jordan Bohannon, the youngest of the four Bohannon brothers, began the season on the varsity and hit three 3-pointers in his first game to help the Lions beat Waukee.

Linn-Mar is undoubtedly the Metro's best bet to crack the Top 10 in the AP rankings, but the Lions are not alone. There could be a darkhorse looming at Xavier, where the Saints are off to a

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nice 3-0 start under new coach Ryan Luehrsmann with victories over Mount Pleasant and Waverly-Shell Rock.

The Saints received a few votes in the AP poll this week and have a legitimate big man in 6-foot-8 junior Matt Nelson. Trey Sampson is off to a strong start at point guard, and Corbin Woods has made a big contribution after barely playing last year as a junior.

The Saints had great success in football. Now they're looking to translate that success onto the basketball court as well.

The Prairie Hawks are off to a 1-3 start, but they'll be a much stronger team when Jace Hanna returns after starting the season on the disabled list with a stress fracture in his foot and the remnants of a sprained ankle. He was hurt during the football season and has needed time to recover. Hanna has signed with Upper Iowa and is one of the top players in the Metro.

The Jefferson J-Hawks could give opponents trouble this year with Jacob Olson and Creighton Robinson in the backcourt and Ky Kramer on the wing. Olson is one of the quickest players in the Metro and could be hard to guard.

The talent pool at Kennedy has dipped from recent years, but Bob Fontana usually assembles a competitive club that stresses the defensive end of the floor. The Cougars are missing guard Derek Jacobus, who tore the labrum in his shoulder at football practice in August and is still on the mend.

Washington is staring at another long season after going winless last year, but new coach Adam Sanchez feels the club is making progress. The Warriors played hard in a loss to North Scott on Saturday, but points will be hard to find.

The Marion Indians appear to have enough good athletes to hold their own in the Wamac Conference this season but they miss Andrew Davis, a 6-foot-6 senior who broke his leg near the end of the football season.

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Cedar Valley Christian has a pesky club at the Class 1A level. Jeremy Strutz poured in 32 points in a game Monday night and the Huskies have enjoyed their switch to IHSA competition, an adjustment period that began last season.

Added together, it doesn't look like a great year for boys basketball in the Metro, but there should be some good games and upsets along the way. And don't be surprised if somebody cracks the Top 10 before it's over.

Linn-Mar could make the Top 10 in a hurry if it beats fifth-ranked North Scott at the Heartland Shootout at the Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines this Saturday, but first the Lions have to handle Jefferson at home Friday night.

Xavier could help itself with a victory over 10th-ranked Dowling at home Saturday afternoon. Prairie could open some eyes against No. 4 Dubuque Senior Friday night.

Stay tuned.

AP RANKINGS

CLASS 4A

1. Iowa City West, 2. Ankeny, 3. Urbandale, 4. Dubuque Senior, 5. North Scott, 6. West Des Moines Valley, 7. Bettendorf, 8. Sioux City East, 9. Western Dubuque, 10. West Des Moines Dowling.

CLASS 3A

1. Sioux City Heelan, 2. Davenport Assumption, 3. MOC/Floyd Valley, 4. Solon, 5. Atlantic, 6. Vinton-Shellsburg, 7. Waverly-Shell Rock, 8. Iowa Falls-Alden, 9. Pella, 10. Spencer.

CLASS 2A

1. Nodaway Valley, 2. Western Christian, 3. Des Moines Christian, 4. West Fork, 5. West Branch, 6. IKM-Manning, 7. Pella Christian, 8. Fort Dodge St. Edmond, 9. Cascade, 10. MFL/MarMac.

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CLASS 1A

1. Danville, 2. Storm Lake St. Mary's, 3. Boyden-Hull, 4. Harris-Lake Park, 5. Lone Tree, 6. North Iowa, 7. Murray, 8. Oakland Riverside, 9. North Tama, 10. Iowa Mennonite.