

Help us pick the top stories of 2015

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 25 December 2015 01:15 - Last Updated Friday, 25 December 2015 12:29



I sat down at the computer Thursday and spent two hours reviewing all the stories we've posted on the Metro Sports Report website in 2015.

I went through the archives day by day, story by story, making a list (and checking it twice) to refresh my memory of everything that's transpired this past year.

The goal was to pick a "Top 10" list for 2015, but I quickly ran into a problem.

It's too hard.

The number of big stories was truly amazing and the list got longer and longer as I flipped through each day, each week and each month from Dec.

24 back to Jan. 1. I went backwards, due to the way the stories are archived, so it was like flipping through the pages of a scrapbook from back to front.

Then it hit me: Why not ask our readers to vote for the top stories?

Why don't you tell me, instead of me telling you?

I've put my own informal list together, based on the stories that really touched me or grabbed my interest. The No. 1 story for me was a truly sad one, but it also became an uplifting story as time went by.

For me, the No. 1 story was Bill Herkelman's sudden death near the end of the high school baseball season and how the Kennedy Cougars dealt with the

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loss of their beloved assistant coach in the state tournament. The Cougars handled the setback with dignity and grace, all of them wearing special shirts at the funeral service and state tournament with Herk's No. 29 in big numbers.

My No. 2 story was the Kennedy football team and its rags-to-riches campaign that ended in the championship game of the state playoffs. It was a story that included Tyler Dralle's assault on the Metro rushing record and the incredible versatility of Shaun Beyer, who became the captain of the all-state team and a future Iowa Hawkeye.

Those are the No. 1 and No. 2 stories for me, but how about you?

My list of top stories has 44 candidates, which I'd like to whittle to a top 10 with your help. Please take a look and give me your thoughts. A simple e-mail with your selections will be fine. We don't need any official ballots or secret envelopes.

Send me your thoughts at Jim.Ecker@MetroSportsReport.com. I'll compile the information and reveal the results next Friday on New Year's Day, so don't wait too long to respond.

Here is the master list, in semi-alphabetical order:

JORDAN BOHANNON - The Linn-Mar basketball star committed to the Iowa Hawkeyes and enjoyed the best game of his career last Friday when he tossed in nine 3-pointers and scored 40 points against Prairie.

COE BASEBALL - The Kohawks won the Iowa Conference tournament and played in the NCAA Division III regional. They missed making the College World Series by one victory.

COE COLLEGE - Coe plans to spend \$20 million on new facilities for the athletic department, with the crown jewel a new gym to replace Eby Fieldhouse. Eby will be remodeled and used as a recreation facility.

STEVE FISH - The Marion High School baseball coach won the 600th game of his successful career.

SHELBY HEMBERA - The Cedar Valley Christian basketball star assaulted the Metro record book in scoring and rebounding, but her final season was cut short by an ankle injury.

BILL HERKELMAN - The long-time Kennedy math teacher and baseball coach died unexpectedly on the eve of the state tournament and received a loving tribute from family, friends, former students and players.

BRET HOYER - The successful Kennedy baseball coach won his 600th game with the Cougars.

DEREK JACOBUS - The Kennedy graduate won the decathlon title in the Missouri Valley Conference as a freshman at Northern Iowa, then transferred to Arkansas.

JAPAN-METRO CLASSIC - More than 600 fans attended the Japan-Metro Classic baseball game at Veterans Memorial Stadium in August. The team from Yamanashi won the ballgame, 6-2.

JEFFERSON GIRLS TRACK - The J-Hawks tied the Iowa all-time best in the 4x100 relay at the Drake Relays and set a new all-time best in the 4x200 relay at the state meet. Current seniors Jasmine Blue and Abbie Ranschau have committed to run at Northern Iowa.

JEFFERSON WRESTLING - The J-Hawks were the undefeated MVC champs in 2015 and finished third at the Class 3A state dual meet tournament.

STEPHANIE JENKS - The Linn-Mar distance star swept the 800-, 1,500- and 3,000-meter runs at the Drake Relays and Class 4A state meet again, was named the Gatorade Athlete of the Year and committed to Cal-Berkeley.

ZACH JOHNSON - The Cedar Rapids Regis grad added another crown jewel to his pro golf career by winning the British Open.

KENNEDY BASEBALL - Zach Daniels and Sammy Lizarraga led the Cougars to the semifinals of the Class 4A state tournament before continuing their baseball careers at the University of Iowa. Daniels was named captain of the all-state elite team.

KENNEDY FOOTBALL - The Cougars finished 13-1 and played in the state finals for the first time in school history, just a year after struggling through a 3-8 campaign. Tyler Dralle broke the Metro single-season rushing record and Shaun Beyer was named captain of the Class 4A all-state team.

KERNELS - The Cedar Rapids Kernels reached the Midwest League playoffs for the third straight year under popular manager Jake Mauer, who will be returning to the Kernels for a fourth campaign in 2016.

KIRKWOOD MEN'S BASKETBALL - Kirkwood guard Hunter Rhodes scored 19 straight points in the final four minutes to give the Eagles an exciting victory over Southeastern at Johnson Hall.

TOM LILLY - The Xavier girls basketball coach won the 500th game of his 31-year career this past Tuesday. He has won four state titles with the

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Saints.

LINN-MAR BOYS SOCCER - The Lions won the first state title in school history.

LINN-MAR BOYS TENNIS - The Lions captured the Class 2A state title.

LINN-MAR GIRLS SWIMMING - Kelsey Drake, Jennifer Jenks and Stephanie Jenks decided not to swim for Linn-Mar this season, stripping the state power of its top performers. Drake, who won two state titles last year, has qualified for the U.S. Olympic Trials in 2016 and is concentrating on that event.

MARION FOOTBALL - Assistant coach Nick Perkins was fired and head coach Tony Perkins was suspended for one game during the 2015 season following an incident during halftime at one of their games.

METRO SPORTS REPORT - The MSR surpassed 5 million page views since its inception in 2011 and passed 1 million pageviews in 2015 for the fourth straight year.

MOUNT MERCY I - The Mount Mercy men's basketball team reached the second round of the NAIA national tournament after dedicating the season to former teammate Danny DeBacker, who was killed by a drunk driver before the season began.

MOUNT MERCY II - The Mustangs promoted long-time men's basketball coach Paul Gavin to athletic director and filled Gavin's spot by switching Aaron Jennings from the women's program to the men's program.

MOUNT MERCY III - Four of Mount Mercy's fall sports teams qualified for NAIA national tournaments.

MOUNT MERCY IV - The NAIA school in northeast Cedar Rapids joined the Heart of America Conference following the demise of the Midwest Collegiate Conference.

KIM MUHL - The Kirkwood women's basketball coach won the 750th game of his legendary career last season and led the Eagles to a fifth-place finish at the NJCAA national tournament. Muhl has won six national titles at Kirkwood.

NORTHERN IOWA BASKETBALL - Metro products Wes Washpun and Matt Bohannon helped the UNI men's basketball team upset top-ranked North Carolina in the McLeod Center this November. Former Linn-Mar star Marcus Paige did not play for Carolina due to an injury.

PRAIRIE BASEBALL - The Hawks won the first Mississippi Valley Conference title in school history and won 31 games under new coach Todd Rima.

PRAIRIE WRESTLING - Blake Williams resigned as head coach of the Prairie wrestling program after a successful tenure and is now the head coach at Solon. Kane Thompson succeeded Williams as head coach following his own successful years at Alburnett.

A.J. PUK - The Cedar Rapids Washington grad pitched a strong game for the Florida Gators in the College World Series.

JALEN RIMA - The Prairie star captured the 200- and 400-meter runs at the Class 4A state track meet and excelled on the football field this fall as a receiver, runner and kick return specialist. He has committed to Northern Iowa for football.

ROUGHRIDERS - The Cedar Rapids RoughRiders enjoyed another successful season and reached the USHL playoffs again in 2015.

SCOTT SCHEBLER - The Cedar Rapids Prairie grad made his Major League debut with the Los Angeles Dodgers and hit three home runs in September. He was traded to the Cincinnati Reds during the off-season.

DAVE SCHEMMEL - Schemmel retired as the Xavier baseball coach after the 2015 season with 431 career victories and one state title. Schemmel had been Xavier's head coach ever since the school opened in 1998.

FARAI SEWERA - Sewera won the 165-pound title for the Coe Kohawks at the NCAA Division III national wrestling tournament.

STEVE STAKER - Staker resigned as the Coe football coach after a successful run that included an Iowa Conference title.

WASHINGTON BOYS SWIMMING - The Warriors finished second at the state meet for the second straight year and Jared Thorson captured the state title in the 100-yard butterfly.

JOSH WENGER - Wenger won the 138-pound title for Cedar Rapids Prairie at the Class 3A state wrestling meet.

MIKE WINKER - Winker announced he will resign as the athletic director at Xavier High School following the 2015-16 school year. Winker has served as the A.D. at Xavier since the school opened in 1998 and has led a successful sports program.

XAVIER BOYS BASKETBALL - The Saints reached the state tournament for the first time in

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school history and finished third in Class 3A.

XAVIER BOYS SOCCER - The Saints captured the seventh state title in school history.

XAVIER FOOTBALL - The Saints rallied from a 28-point halftime deficit and stunned Iowa City Regina, 38-35, on a last-second field goal by Dallas Klein. The Saints made the Class 3A playoffs again this year.