

Metro area among the best for its size

Written by Scott Unash

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This week marks the annual stampede known as National Signing Day, where high school athletes from around the country sign on the dotted line for their school of choice for their college careers.

It is certainly one of the most memorable days in an athlete's young life as they are "in the spotlight" for a day as their choices are made. There are hundreds of great stories each and every year about many of these athletes, and two of the better ones came from right here in the Metro area.

It's been well documented over the years that our Metro area is the home to two of the greatest success stories in the last two decades of sports across the country. And they started out with the "spotlight" on them for National Signing Day. They are, of course, Zach Johnson and Kurt Warner.

Johnson made his decision to sign with Drake out of Regis High School. He was never the top golfer for the Royals, but was certainly a good one and had a ton of potential, although I'm sure even Drake did not perhaps see a major championship in his future! Warner also came out of Regis as one of the top quarterbacks of his senior year. The Panthers saw him as a very good athlete who could be an asset for UNI during their playoff runs. I doubt anyone on the Panther staff saw him as an NFL Most Valuable Player and Super Bowl winner.

What these players have in common with most that come out of the Metro area is a passion for their sport and limitless potential. Each year a few Division I athletes are signed out of the Metro, although many more athletes go on to schools at other levels of the NCAA and NAIA.

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Why does this happen?

It starts off with good coaching. The Metro area is very blessed with great teachers of the game. One also needs the passion and desire to want to achieve your best and go to the next level. We also have that here with the "Midwest work ethic" instilled in most of our young people.

I would love to do a comparison of our Metro area with other cities of similar size around the country. I would be willing to wager that the Cedar Rapids-Marion Metro area has one of the highest percentages of Division I athletes for our size than any in the country.

Not only have we had a terrific past with the Johnsons, Warners and others, but the future looks bright as well. Just take a look at basketball, with eight Division I players at the moment and others coming down the line, including Marcus Paige heading off to North Carolina next fall. You usually read and hear about athletes like that from much bigger metropolitan areas, but there is a good percentage that hail from our neck of the woods.

So, congratulations to this year's group of signees, and best of luck at your destination. With hard work and the proper amount of dedication, you never know how many of these people we will be watching and hearing about over the next several years. Who knows ... there may be another Johnson or Warner, or even bigger and better, right around the corner.

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