

Looking ahead to the girls tournament

Written by Scott Unash

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The tickets have been punched. Thirty-two teams in four classes are headed off to the capitol city and the Girls State Basketball Tournament next week. Included in that number are a pair of Metro teams in Linn-Mar and Washington.

There is something magical about watching teams celebrate after winning a championship, or in this case, earning a trip to state.

Before we take a look at the 4A field, a few comments about the week in Des Moines are in order. For the most part the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union does an outstanding job of hosting the annual affair at Wells Fargo Arena. I do have a couple of suggestions, though.

First of all, get rid of the dreaded 10 a.m. game on the first three days of the tournament. No games should be played at that time. In fact, no games of any kind should be played at that early hour.

I say "early" even though it is the mid-point of the morning, but c'mon, let's face it: How many 16 through 18-year-olds are in full function at that time? For that matter, how many adults are even roaring to go at that time?

Fix the schedule so you start at a much more manageable time, no earlier than 11:30.

The other suggestion would be to wait and seed the state tournament teams after they have qualified. Right now, the IGHS AU sends out its "Line Pairings" a couple of weeks before the tournament, assigning each Region to a particular time and spot on the bracket.

This works great if all the favorites in each class make it to Des Moines, but if there are upsets along the way, it throws the entire class upside down. For example, this year in Classes 1A and 2A, there were many upsets and a good share of unrated teams made it to Des Moines. With that being said, it would be much wiser to wait until you know the strength of the qualifying teams before you set up the brackets.

Those are ticky-tack suggestions, though. The Girls Union is great to work with and they run a first-class show. Even though the sellout crowds are gone from the bygone era of six-player basketball, it is still a fabulous "Show" with the performances by the singers, dancers and yes, the basketball players.

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Now back to this year in Class 4A.

You could call this the MVC-CIML Shootout. All eight teams hail from these two power leagues, unquestionably the top two in the state. The top half of the bracket has three MVC teams, including the two Metro squads with Linn-Mar and Washington, while the bottom consists of four CIML teams (Ankeny is the lone non-MVC team in the upper tier).

I see the top half being a real dogfight. All three of the MVC teams, Linn-Mar, Washington and Iowa City West, have a shot at going to the title game. And don't discount Ankeny, even though it hit a rough patch at the end of the season. Ankeny has one of the top basketball minds in the state in Coach Scott DeJong and will be a very tough out.

If Linn-Mar can get Kiah Stokes rolling offensively and hit outside shots, it has to be a favorite to go back to the title game. Washington beat Linn-Mar in the regular-season finale and is a team with tons of confidence right now. The Warriors must keep Tia Dawson out of foul trouble and avoid silly fouls.

The Wash-Iowa City West game could be a fans' delight with two up-tempo teams running up and down the court. West won the first go-round, but Washington is playing much better now and I like the chances for an all-Metro semifinal between Linn-Mar and Washington, and let the best team win the third and deciding game of the year.

On the bottom half of the bracket, Des Moines East is the overwhelming favorite and looks to take on our Metro survivor on Saturday night, March 5. Who wins?

East would be the favorite, but it will have a ton of pressure. In addition, MVC teams have played a tougher schedule overall. It should be a great final, which will probably come down to the end.

Who knows. Maybe we have another game-winning shot awaiting another Metro girl this season.