

A slice of Americana

Written by Scott Unash

Monday, 19 December 2011 22:14 - Last Updated Wednesday, 21 December 2011 21:22



I love calling and watching Metro basketball. The terrific athletes, the top-flight coaches, the strategy. It's compelling more often than not night in and night out.

But there is something about basketball in the smaller towns.

Last Thursday night, my partner Phil Dunne and I got to call the game on KGYM radio between Cedar Valley Christian and North Linn from Troy Mills, and once again I was reminded what makes small-town athletics so great.

The night is a unique combination of a social get-together along with the game. The high school and it's activities are the center of the area in these towns. It doesn't matter if your son or daughter is the leading scorer, or graduated 10 years ago, you still come to the game.

Why?

To talk to your neighbor, your old teacher, the kids back from college for break. Whatever the reason, everyone is there supporting the kids on the court. Most of the students in school, who are not a part of the team, are there cheering their classmates on because that is the place to be. They watch the game. They cheer for their team, not against the other school.

It's much the same for the parents and townspeople as well. You see the parents of the players with their buttons of their son or daughter. But you also see the farmer who is done with the daily chores coming to town to watch the kids down the road play.

They are there because they have a sense of pride in what goes on in their town, and they want to see that pride keep going through their school and their activities.

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Don't get me wrong. I love the intense battles between the city schools. But more often than not you don't see the camaraderie at the games that you witness in the smaller classes.

That's what makes high school athletics in Iowa so great. You have, I think, a nearly perfect combination of the uniqueness of the small school experience with that of the big school atmosphere.

Do yourself a favor and go out and see a game this winter at one of the 2A or 1A schools. It will be an experience you will treasure.

(Scott Unash is the sports and program director at KGYM-AM 1600. 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)