

MSR has 750,000 reasons to say thanks

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 02 January 2012 18:21 - Last Updated Monday, 02 January 2012 18:35



Mike Koolbeck and I were reasonably sure the Metro Sports Report would be well-received in the community when we launched our website on Jan. 3, 2011.

After all, who would be opposed to thorough coverage of all the high school teams in Cedar Rapids and Marion?

Koolbeck and I had been around the block a few times during our newspaper careers (OK, more than a few times), and we thought we had a chance to be successful with a website that was devoted to prep sports in our part of Linn County.

How successful? We honestly had no idea.

We had a meeting with a potential advertiser before we launched the Metro Sports Report, and the folks we were speaking with wanted to know how many "hits" we thought we'd get for the website. In other words, they wanted to know how much of a bang they'd get for their bucks if they decided to support us.

My brilliant response, as the company president, went something like this: I have no clue, no earthly idea, no way of knowing, no way of predicting the great unknown.

It was an honest response, but needless to say we did not land that account. Maybe now we will.

The Metro Sports Report is celebrating its first anniversary today - Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2012 - and the numbers are in. More accurately, the Google analytics are in, and they're fantastic. We didn't know what to expect when we began this labor of love a year ago, but quite frankly we did not expect this.

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We've had 79,664 unique visitors since we launched the website a year ago, and by "unique visitors" we mean the total number of different computer I.P. addresses that have dialed us up since Jan. 3, 2011.

We cannot count the total number of people who have visited our website, because more than one person can use the same computer, but 79,664 unique visitors seems like a fairly high total for a sports website that's devoted to the eight high schools in Cedar Rapids and Marion. You are welcome to make your own judgment on that.

We had 244,871 total visits during Year 1, which means that each "unique visitor" returned more than three times (on average) during 2011.

We also had a total of 750,410 page views during Year 1 as visitors clicked around our website, moving from school to school, sport to sport and team to team. Once again you can draw your own conclusions, but that seems like a lot of clicks.

We began the project with a fairly simple idea: To write stories about the Metro high schools, all 21 varsity sports, boys and girls, all year long, without fear or favor, without a lot of bells and whistles, just good old-fashioned journalism, giving the schools, teams and athletes the recognition they richly deserve.

We've tried to marry the old with the new, combining the best aspects of a community newspaper with the Internet. It seems to be working, based on the numbers.

Many people have thanked us for the work we're doing, which is always nice to hear. In return, we'd like to thank all the people who have helped make the Metro Sports Report a success.

First of all, we thank all the readers for making us a part of your day. We try to offer fresh news on a daily basis with a blend of game stories, features, columns, breaking news, scores, schedules, standings, rankings and stats.

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We also thank our readers for their story ideas, many of which we've pursued and some of which are still on the list.

We'd also like to thank all the school administrators, coaches and athletes for your time and support. We couldn't write all these stories without your help and willingness to talk to us after games, win or lose.

We began the year by covering Jefferson, Kennedy, Linn-Mar, Marion, Prairie, Washington and Xavier, then added Cedar Valley Christian to the website after the Huskies joined the IHSA and IGHSAA for their varsity sports.

Mike Koolbeck and I also would like to thank all the talented writers, reporters, photographers, advertising sales representatives and website administrators who have made such great contributions to the Metro Sports Report. It's a long list and continues to grow, almost on a weekly basis.

We feel we have three of the best feature writers in the business with Tom Fruehling, Sher Jasperse and Dan Kellams, whose stories have graced our pages the past year.

We also feel we have three eminent columnists with Mark Dukes, Scott Unash and Bob Brooks, each of whom brings a unique perspective to the MSR and our community.

We think we have a talented and knowledgeable collection of reporters with Jake Koolbeck, Guy Martino, Carl Gonder, Don Taylor, Randy Krejci and Mike Deupree, all with deep roots in the Metro area. Tom Fruehling and Sher Jasperse belong in that group as well, bringing their superb story-telling to game stories and features.

Ken Gilchrist and Margaret O'Banion have done a superb job as our top photographers, helping bring events to life, and they also deserve credit for starting our popular Photo Gallery in September, where readers can purchase our photos at reasonable prices.

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Karen Woods deserves special credit for her great contributions to the Metro Sports Report in the advertising sales department. Quite frankly, we might not have survived Year 1 without her terrific work with advertisers. Our readers may not recognize her name, but our business clients certainly do.

Carl Whiting also has operated behind the scenes, supervising the sales staff and keeping a sharp eye on the analytics. He's another behind-the-scenes component of our success. Dave Thul is another key member of that sales team.

There are several dozen other folks who have made valuable contributions, including parents and students who have voluntarily written stories and supplied pictures. We thank them as well.

Heaven knows we're not perfect. We've missed stories, we've botched a few names, we've bothered a few coaches by calling late at night for a missing score. It's the nature of the beast, but we'll continue to try and get better.

Most of all, Mike Koolbeck and I just want to say thanks. Thanks for reading our stories, thanks for looking at our pictures, thanks for supporting the website.

It's been great fun. We've enjoyed having you along for the ride.