

How high school sports have changed

Written by Bob Brooks

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First of all, I would like to congratulate all of the people who have put the Metro Sports Report together. I fully support this effort and wish it well and think it will serve the Cedar Rapids and Marion high schools with excellent coverage.

High school athletics in my mind have always been in the forefront of what I have covered over a period of years, from my days at Franklin High School as an athlete who wasn't any good, but I did get coached by a gentleman named Orville Rust. And this column will give you an overview of how high school athletics have changed from my time in the late 1930s and early 1940s to today.

Some of the things that Orville taught and coached are still on my mind, things I refer to from time to time. That shows you how much a football coach, basketball coach and track coach could influence a high school athlete, even into his latter years.

And in my view, the same thing is true today. So what are the changes? The changes are that Coach Rust, when it came time for football season, checked out the equipment and coached the team. When it came time for the basketball season, he put the football equipment away, got out the basketball equipment and coached the team.

And in those days, if you played football and basketball for the Franklin Thunderbolts in Cedar Rapids, you had to go out for track. And at that time Coach Rust checked in the basketball equipment and got out the track equipment. And I would add, I hated track. Probably not as much as field.

Then in the summer, Coach Rust had a cabin next to the Marion swimming pool in Thomas Park. And he taught his athletes who couldn't swim how to swim, and he managed the pool during the summer.

So that pretty much was the phys-ed program at Franklin High School. Now, what did we miss?

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Well, there were no summer camps, no specialty coaches, nothing like Perfect Game. If you wanted to participate in something, you could get a gang of athletes together, choose up sides and have a game.

Meaning, that the parents didn't have to join a team or a league and pick up or deliver an athlete to that activity. It was all done for the love of the game.

I dare say that if you would take away all of this organized activity today, athletic participation would be nil. Because they just don't do it that way anymore.

And there was no what you call specialization in sports as there is now. No television, no videotape, no produced highlight cassettes, and really not a great deal of parental interference.

So those are some of the things that have changed in athletics at the high school level, and I'll let you draw your own conclusion whether the old way or the new way is the best.

But the main thing in my mind is that the experience of athletics at the high school level, both boys and girls, has been maintained. And whether the athletes today are that much better because of it is still open for questions.

But one thing is constant, and that is if you have been a high school athlete, later in life you'll go back to some of the things that you were taught by the coach.