

High school bowling is here to stay

Written by Mark Dukes

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Iowa's newest sanctioned high school sport isn't like the rest. There are no two-a-day practices in the heat of August. No cheerleaders or pep band. No tickets sales at the door.

High school bowling hasn't exactly captured the imagination of student bodies, nor the general public. But it's a sport that is taking off in Iowa. It's a sport highly competitive but also perfect for the student who just wants to participate.

Every Metro school has a boys' and girls' bowling team now. Actually, several local schools have assembled bowlers the past couple decades, but it is only recently that the sport has been sanctioned by the Iowa High School Athletic Association (last year) and the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union (2005).

Over 80 schools now field varsity bowling teams in Iowa, separated into two classes (by enrollment) for post-season competition. They are as small as Mormon Trail of Garden Grove, with a pool of 59 students, and as large as West Des Moines Valley (over 2,000 students).

Some will question bowling's viability as a sport as compared to, say, football. Much like golf, bowling is a sport that does not require its participants to be in supreme physical shape. Bowlers do not endure physical punishments like football players or wrestlers. Stamina is not much of an issue.

But bowling certainly requires a skill set. It requires balance, precision, concentration, mental preparation and a certain amount of strength.

High school bowling also requires some discipline. State rules require team members to dress alike, in long pants with similar color. Shirts must have collars with no advertising. No hats are allowed on the lanes. No cell phones, either.

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For some, bowling has presented a path to college. Local bowlers have received financial aid to bowl at the next level. Mount Mercy University has recently added bowling as a varsity sport, joining a handful of other Iowa colleges. More than half of the Big Ten schools have bowling teams, as do other larger universities such as Arizona State and Florida State.

And my guess is that bowling is only going to mushroom in terms of participation in Iowa high schools. It is a relatively inexpensive sport, for one, which allows even the smallest of schools to field teams. It also affords youngsters of all shapes and sizes to try their hand at an extracurricular activity. And there is a collection of highly qualified coaches willing to pass on their knowledge of a sport in which they've been involved for years.

No, bowling may not get the headlines and recruiting websites like high school football and basketball. It may not require the skills of some other sports. And it may not get the student body following. But bowling is one high school sport that is here to stay, and probably only going to grow in terms of participation. No harm in that.