

## Take nothing for granted in the summer

Written by Scott Unash

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You have heard the cliches.

"Take it one game at a time."

"Underestimate no one."

Those are just two bromides that we have come to know and love over the years. Those of us who have followed sports have heard them all when talking about an opponent, and while they are for the most part true, there are times when a coach knows his/her team should advance against a lesser foe.

But that can not be said for the summer sports.

If you did the research over the past several decades, it would not take one long to see that the summer sports of baseball and softball provide the greatest number of upsets of rated teams on the road to the state tournaments.

In football and basketball, more often than not especially in the early rounds, there are very few if any upsets. That cannot be said for baseball and softball.

Many a top team has been shelved somewhere along the line when facing a team that has the bats going or a hot pitcher for one night. That's what makes baseball and softball so interesting, and frustrating at times.

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Why is that? Well, baseball and softball are the only sports where the pace and action is for the most part controlled by the defense, or, most notably, the pitcher. There have been many cases where a team with a sub-.500 record has upset a rated foe because they do have that one dominant ace who can shut down the bats of a team's offense.

Look no further than the 2010 Washington baseball team as a great example. The Warriors were heavy underdogs against a top five rated Davenport Central team in the opening round. The Warriors had a terrific pitcher though in Dakota Frese who handcuffed the heavily favored Blue Devils and sent them to the sidelines.

Another Washington team that is a great example of what can happen when all three phases of the game come together - hitting, pitching and defense - is the 1994 Warriors. Wash finished the regular season at .500, but got hot at the right time for Coach Rick Netolicky. The Warriors put together a terrific playoff run and found themselves at the state tournament.

The fun didn't stop there, and before you knew it the Warriors had one themselves a state championship with a not so glossy record of 21-15. I truly believe that only in baseball could a team with a record similar to that take that path and pull off a series of upsets to win a title.

It also can go the other way. Several highly rated Metro teams have had their sights set on the state tournament only to fall victim to a team on a hot night.

In 2005, Jefferson had one of their best teams in recent years, but the J-Hawks ran into a buzzsaw on the night of the substate final and fell to unrated Prairie, sending the Hawks to their only state appearance.

Another example I know very well. In 1984 a top five rated Kennedy squad was heavily favored to beat a Washington team in a district final that they had handled three times that summer. The Warriors brought up a sophomore pitcher to throw that night and shut down the favored Cougars 2-1, ending their terrific season. That game still hurts to this day.

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So baseball and softball favorites beware. A trip to the state tournament is very much earned in the summer because so many variables can take place between the lines of the diamond.

Many times a look at the pairings for the state baseball and softball tournaments can look nothing like what was expected based upon the seeds going into play in July.

It's another reason why baseball and softball are such terrific sports ... you never can predict what will happen from one night to the next.

*(Scott Unash is the sports and program director at KGYM-AM 1600 (FM 106.3). 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-AM 1600 and FM-106.3)*