

Jefferson baseball field damaged by storm

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 17 June 2014 14:16

The Jefferson High School baseball field in southwest Cedar Rapids was heavily damaged late Monday night when a severe storm packing heavy winds tore through the facility and local neighborhoods.

"They're confirming it was a tornado," Jefferson baseball coach Kyle Rodenkirk said Tuesday afternoon at the field.

A thick wooden light pole that was stationed down the left-field line was snapped in half and thrown onto the field, smashing the lights and leaving shards of glass in left field.

Three other light poles on the first-base side and in right field were damaged, although not toppled over. The outfield fence in right field was knocked over, bleachers were damaged and a portable batting cage was tossed onto Rockford Road SW and crumpled.

Chris Deam, Jefferson's athletic director, was not prepared to put a price tag on the damage, but it easily could be tens of thousands of dollars. He said the field is covered by insurance through Cedar Rapids Community Schools.

Jefferson was scheduled to host Des Moines East in a baseball game Tuesday night, but that game was postponed and likely canceled. The next home games are scheduled for Monday, June 23 against Dubuque Senior, but the J-Hawks have made plans to play those games at Kirkwood Community College with a tentative starting time of 3 p.m.

Deam was not sure how long the field would be out of commission for night games. "It depends on how fast insurance works, how fast they can fix the poles," he said.

Deam said Jefferson might be able to play day games on the field at some point, but was not sure when. Jefferson teams also may be able to practice on parts of the field.

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Work crews were at the field Tuesday making repairs, along with Jefferson personnel.

Jefferson's No. 2 softball field also sustained damaged Tuesday night, but the varsity softball field was unharmed, according to Deam.

The Jefferson baseball team played a doubleheader at home against Xavier Monday night. The second game was stopped in the top of the seventh inning due to lightning and threatening weather at approximately 9:15 p.m. Everyone departed before the storm hit and damaged the field.

"I'm just happy nobody got hurt," said Rodenkirk.

Jefferson High School and the Jefferson baseball team helped make improvements at the field for the 2014 season, but Monday night's storm foiled their efforts.

"It's tough," said Rodenkirk. "We put a lot of time - coaching staff and players - to get it where we wanted. In a span of a half-hour, it's all back to square one."

On the positive side, Rodenkirk speculated that Jefferson could emerge from the storm with an even better facility once repairs are made.

Homes in Jefferson neighborhoods in southwest Cedar Rapids were damaged by the storm by toppled trees and strong winds. Several roads were closed Tuesday while clean-up crews and repair crews did their work.