



What Makes Sports in the Fox Cities so Special?

MATT TEN HAKEN
DIRECTOR OF SPORTS MARKETING
FOX CITIES CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

I've had people who live in the state, but not in the Fox Cities, ask me why it always seems like there is a team from the Fox Valley competing for a WIAA title. I've had colleagues from around the country ask me how we are able to get such great community support for facility development and event leadership and volunteering. I've had area residents tell me how shocked they are by huge participant numbers for events like a fun run or a youth learn to play sports camps. These scenarios above have occurred for a multitude of reasons, but I believe the two main factors are: the pride we have in the history and successes of sports in the area and the passion of the individuals who lead sports in the Fox Cities.

Success breeds success. It's easy to understand why a kid would want to practice their game and try to emulate stars from the area like Appleton West Grad and McDonald's All-American Brian Butch, or Neenah Grad, McDonald's All-American, and current UConn Huskie Allie Ziebell, or Appleton Xavier Grad Rocky Bleier who was a four-time Super Bowl Champion with the Pittsburgh Steelers, or Freedom Grad and Olympic Greco-Roman Wrestling Bronze medalist Garrett Lowney, or the first woman to play golf intercollegiate golf at Marquette University, Mary Beth Nienhaus. That list of individuals from the area who have achieved high levels of athletic success truly could go on and on. But then there are also the dominant athletic programs like Kaukauna Wrestling, Neenah Tennis, or Kimberly Football. Not only do the kids watching their hometown teams want to replicate the success they see, but so do the parents, coaches, and administrators throughout the Fox Cities.

Leaders from area Parks and Recreation Departments and branches of the YMCA of the Fox Cities take pride in keeping their venues in top shape and are constantly refining their programming to tailor their offerings to the needs of the community. Youth sports coaches at all levels pour their knowledge and passion into their teams to get the best out of each athlete. Donors support fundraisers for upgraded facilities, equipment, jerseys, and travel costs. Parents are willing to pay the registration fees, do countless pickups and drop-offs, and provide the necessary mental and emotional support to help their young athletes through the ups and downs of the season. This leads to High School athletes performing on the big stage, in their school colors, and representing their community. And when they compete at the highest of levels, they inspire those that watch them to dream their own athletic dreams and the cycle repeats itself.