

The Picture of a U.P. All-Star/The Red Line

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By Brandon Veale - DMG Sports Editor

Whenever I take a posed photo, whether it be after a championship game or perhaps for a feature story, I tell the subject that I'm going to take two or three cracks at it because I'm not a very good photographer.

Well, during Saturday's U.P. All-Star Football game, I was pleasantly surprised to be having a good photo day. You saw a few of the results of that in Monday's paper.

But some of the scenes pictured - a fantastic example of pass defense by Calumet's Ben Steber for the West, the celebration after a perfectly-executed touchdown pass by Calumet's Nate Sturos to Ontonagon's Mike Schmaus - those are much less accidental.

The all-star games I covered over the past two weeks have been a fun experience, not just because it gives the U.P.'s best one more chance to show off their quality but not in a high-pressure setting.

I'm a better photographer than I was when I started out in Escanaba three and a half years ago because of all the times I've pushed the shutter button. The 17 football players and three basketball players from our area that got to call themselves All-Stars got to that point through infinitely more hard work.

Shooting form like that of Taylor Kaurala or Stephanie Bonenfant isn't triggered by pixie dust. It comes from hours in the driveway shooting. I'm willing to bet that most if not all of those 17 football all-stars found themselves in the weight room on a Monday morning when they'd rather be sleeping in.

In the workplace, on the playing field, I love it when I see people who have put in the preparation get rewarded. So, for those hanging up their cleats for the last time, one final salute. For those taking their game to the next level (even if that level is intramurals), best of luck. For those who still have time to go in their career, may our area's best for the year serve as an example for you as you prepare for a 2010-11 season that is closer than you think.

Here's a few more little things I noticed both at and after this month's all-star games.

As was mentioned in the story, Taylor Kaurala was the third Houghton Gremlin in the last 10 years to win the Most Outstanding Player Award at the U.P. All-Star Basketball Classic. In fact, the Copper Country has had a significant amount of success at that event. In fact, other area winners of the award include: Kristin Hager (1988) and Shannon Helminen (2006) of Calumet, Paula Wesa (1997) of Jeffers and Shelly Colette (1990) of Dollar Bay. That's seven for Houghton County. No other county has more than four girls' MVPs in the 25-year history of the event.

These games are all about having fun, even if the rules have to be bent a little bit to accommodate it. A few players (whose names have been changed to protect the innocent) actually picked up six fouls. After foul number five, the players in question each had to take a seat for a few minutes, but headed back out there - not without some ribbing from their own bench. Of course, this gave me the chance to ask one of the refs - former Minor League umpire Nick Nolde of Escanaba - "Ever foul a kid out of the same game twice?"

I've been to the Superior Dome twice for the U.P. Football All-Star Game and both times I've been rather amazed at how well Todd Goldbeck and the folks at Xcel Sports Training have done it. It's one thing to get a handful of kids together in a high school gym with their old uniforms and have a go at it. But to get together 100 players and coaches for a week, plus all sorts of support staff like cheerleaders, a color guard, and all of the other bells and whistles, that's a herculean effort. Granted, the players help this effort, too, but after three years of this, it's safe to say that this game is become a welcomed fixture of U.P. summers.

Lake Linden-Hubbell head coach Andy Crouch brought a few of his players with some leftover eligibility: Brett Gervais, Stefan Liimatainen and Jordan Hahka, to take stats for their side. Their work is highly appreciated from this chair. Lord knows I'm rusty on my football notation and though I tried to keep up my own notes, having a good back-up was a luxury I don't take lightly.