

FanFest does job as winter thaw

Baseball goodwill makes up for the financial losses

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Iowa Cubs officials readily admit that their annual FanFest weekend has been a losing proposition in terms of dollars and cents.

But in this case, the real story is not in the box score.

There were, in fact, a lot of smiling faces regarding the turnout for Friday's luncheon at the Polk County Convention Complex in Des Moines and over the various baseball-related festivities Friday and Saturday at the Knapp Center on the campus of Drake University.

"The intention of doing this doesn't have anything to do with making money," Iowa Cubs general manager Sam Bernabe said. "It's directly related to energizing baseball fans. When we started this four years ago, it was to get baseball fans thawed out a little quicker than spring training, to get them thinking about buying baseball tickets. And it gets us a good week's worth of publicity."

After being held at the Embassy Suites hotel in Des Moines the first year, FanFest moved to the Polk County Convention Complex in 2001-02, with the Knapp Center taking center stage for all this year's activities except the luncheon.

Officials said economics played a role in the switch to the Knapp Center, but that venue seems to have been the perfect fit.

"It fits with the motif with what we're trying to do, the sports theme," Bernabe said. "Certainly the convention center was more than adequate. In fact, if it had a fault it's that it was probably too big for what we were trying to do.

"What (the Knapp Center) does is that it kind of compacts everything. I think it's a good facility for this kind of thing and this size activity."

Bernabe said the team is already looking at potential FanFest dates for next year, preferably around the same time, though if the event is to return to Drake it will have to be scheduled around the Bulldogs' basketball schedule.

“At this point I wouldn’t want to put the season on without trying to do a FanFest,” Bernabe said. “We will always try to have some kind of activity going on. It will always change or adjust maybe a little bit only because of the economics of it. Expenses go up and you just hope that the revenues at least come close to matching it.”

Listach says he sought I-Cubs post

Former American League rookie of the year Pat Listach, entering his third season as the Iowa Cubs hitting coach, was passed over for the team’s managerial post after serving as interim skipper last season when Bruce Kimm replaced Don Baylor as manager of the Chicago Cubs.

Mike Quade, who spent three years as a coach with the Oakland Athletics after 13 seasons as a minor-league manager, was named to replace Kimm this season.

“I definitely wanted the job,” said the 35-year old Listach, who hit .251 in six seasons with Milwaukee and Houston before ending his career in 1997.

“It’s one of those things where they wanted to go with somebody with more managerial experience and Mike Quade definitely fits that bill.

“He’s been in the big leagues as a first base coach with Oakland, and he’s put his time in. (They) were just honest with me and came out and told me, ‘Look, we’re going to go with more managerial experience.’ ”

Listach, however, still has his eye on managing.

“I know the game, not just managing and not just hitting, but also as far as defensive positioning and infield work, double plays, first base,” he said. “I know a little bit about everything in the game.”