

RAISING EXPECTATIONS

COMMENTARIES FOR INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS

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FOREWORD



For 14 years I've been taking some space in MHSAA publications and some time in the busy days of some readers to write a column to which I affix my name.

My editorials are intended as much to provoke thinking as to report fact. But even more, my editorials are intended to force me to clarify my thinking by articulating and defending it on the printed page.

In the early and mid 1970's, I was privileged to work with Clifford Fagan who was then executive secretary of the National Federation of State High School Associations. I remember vividly conversations with Mr. Fagan in which he lamented that fewer and fewer state high school association executive officers were writing about interscholastic athletics. He advised me to take time always to write . . . to take time to organize my thinking and defend it on paper. He said the process would clarify my thinking and that the responses would validate (or invalidate) my opinions.

So I write. I write to communicate with others, and also communicate with myself. To describe an idea and debate it internally and then stand behind it when it's printed.

Writing cultivates clear ideas, and clear ideas create consistent commitment. We can't get enough of either in the educational athletic community of this state or nation.■

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John F. Roberts". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

**"NEVER ACT UPON A SUBJECT UNTIL YOU HAVE
FIRST WRITTEN UPON IT."**

—CICERO

PART I

**“ . . . TO WORK FOR THIS GENERATION OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
AND THE NEXT, TO PRESERVE A PLACE IN OUR PROGRAMS FOR ALL
STUDENTS, REGARDLESS OF ATHLETIC ABILITY, WHO MEET ALL
THE ESSENTIAL STANDARDS OF ELIGIBILITY AND WHO WANT
A PLACE ON THE TEAM . . . ”**

RAISING EXPECTATIONS

MAY 1987

Following a presentation I made at a Fellowship of Christian Athletes breakfast during the Mid-Winter Meeting of the Michigan Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association, a lady said to me, "You should have been a preacher."

I accepted that as a compliment but have paused several times since that day to wonder if I might "preach" just a little too much. So much of my time is spent pointing out the flaws of interscho-

lastic athletics and urging raised standards for interscholastic athletics that I bet I sound "preachy" at times.

Many of you who have taken the time to read this far have the same tendency. We love interscholastic athletics. We know of the tremendous potential interscholastic athletics have to educate young people in ways traditional parts of the school curriculum do not. And we ache because we see the vehicle we love falling short of the mark of making a positive difference in the lives of young people. We grieve because we sometimes see our programs do damage to young people.

So you and I point out flaws in people and programs. We call on people to raise their expectations of themselves and the people and programs they supervise.

You and I have a tough choice. First, to keep silent and give up on the program in which we have believed and to which we have devoted huge portions of our lives. Or, to speak out and attempt to raise the expectations of those involved in interscholastic athletics.

Should we remain silent when we find athletes have damaged a state final site? When we hear obscenities and racial epithets from a coach? When we observe persistent fighting among players? When we see

disrespect by one team toward another during awards ceremonies? When we're forced to listen to vulgarity and viciousness from spectators?

The MHSAA Constitution gives the Executive Director two functions. One is to collect information, render decisions and fix penalties. The other is "to develop a high type of sportsmanship among schools, athletes and the general public."

Because of the mandate of the MHSAA Constitution, and the mandate of conscience, we state an emphatic "No" to remaining silent when standards of behavior fall short of those which are required of an activity that is sponsored by a school and conducted in the name of education.

It is not enough that interscholastic athletics are a part of schools. They must be a good part. ■

"It is not enough that interscholastic athletics are a part of schools. They must be a good part."

VISION OR ILLUSION

MAY 1988

As my second year as your executive director draws to a close, it is tempting to reflect upon the high points and lows, and the changes that have occurred. Tempting, perhaps, but not as much fun as remembering the places I have been and the people I have met.

When I go to my wife's high school class reunion this summer in Illinois, I will tell her friends that my job takes me to Holland, Paris, and Sidney; and they will think of lands across the sea,

rather than communities within our state. After one trip, I told my wife I have been to Hell and back and she thought I was speaking figuratively. Literally, I have visited both Paradise and Hell during the last two years.

Some of our schools are closer to the Atlantic coast than they are to schools they will oppose in an MHSAA tournament. Ours is a very large state with diverse interests to which to be attentive. We are two peninsulas and in two time zones. We are urban, suburban and rural. We are extremely congested and remotely isolated. We are schools for boys and girls, and we are an association of public and private schools. We are communities where high school sports is king, the most important activity in

town; and we are communities where high school athletics must compete for recognition or even survival with college and professional sports.

Nevertheless, despite the size and diversity of our state, I have heard school people saying amazingly similar things — not everywhere, of course, but consistently enough that we are forced to take notice. Somehow, almost magically, school people have developed similar concerns for what high school athletics are today, and a clear

and consistent vision of what they want to see in the future.

There is a common vision for our programs in which it isn't rare that an all-stater in one sport is all-conference in another sport and a non-starter in a third; in which even four-sport athletes are not rare because they participate in summer programs of their communities in sports that are different from the three sports in which they compete for their high schools. It's a vision of athletics where there are opportunities to experiment and try, not always to excel and triumph. It's a vision of educational athletics.

There is a vision for our programs in which coaches actually coach more during the high school season than outside it. It is a vision in which

"It's a vision of athletics where there are opportunities to experiment and try, not always to excel and triumph. It's a vision of educational athletics."

administrators can say such things as these without being called “out of touch” and coaches can do such things without being termed “lazy” and athletes can pursue variety over victory without being told they lack commitment and discipline. It is a vision of amateur athletics.

For our personnel, there is a vision of professionalism. It’s a vision in which every official belongs to a local officials association, every coach belongs to his or her state coaches association, every athletic director is active in the Michigan Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association, and in which every principal sets the tone and standard for the conduct of athletics in his or her school. It is a vision in which every coach is a certified teacher or, if not, has participated in an in-service program for nonfaculty coaches.

There is a vision in which male coaches of girls’ teams are the exception rather than the rule, and where the same can be said of male officials for girls’ contests. It’s a vision that’s greater than equality; it’s a vision of role models.

There is a vision for our programs in which cheerleaders actually lead cheers. And they lead cheers at events for athletes of both genders, on all levels, in every sport. It’s a vision of equal support of all athletes with regard not just to race and gender, but also to age and ability.

There is a vision for our programs in which unsportsmanlike conduct by players, coaches and fans is so rare that everyone is embarrassed when they see it occur. It’s a vision of self-control.

There is a vision for our programs in which schools live by the regulations as they read them and report violations as they see them. It’s a vision of self-governance.

It is our hope that enough school people have this vision, and will act on it, that this thinking will be more than a wild hair in the slick professionalized and specialized world of athletics in the United States. We hope with many of you that the interscholastic program continues to be an oasis of amateur, educational athletics, and not merely an illusion that fools us into thinking we have something worth devoting our lives to.■

YEAR 2000 CONVERSION

NOVEMBER 1998

There's a lot of attention being given by technocrats and bureaucrats to the crisis in technology that may occur if there is failure to adequately plan and convert data processing systems for the year 2000. I wish we would worry as much and prepare ourselves as well for other challenges of the next millennium.

As I think about my professional goals for the year 2000 and beyond, a lot of thoughts of doing things bigger or better pass through my mind. But I think the following event motivates me most as I look to the challenges for the year 2000 and beyond.

Several years ago I spoke to a parents group at an elementary school. Most were parents of elementary school students. Most were moms.

During our discussion, the mothers pleaded with me—that's not too strong a word—to help develop policies that would preserve a place on high school teams for their children. "Just a jersey," one mom said. "Just a spot on the team."

These parents were almost sick with worry that if their sons and daughters did not play one sport,

year-round, starting now, they wouldn't make the team in high school. And they believed that not making the team would doom their children to absenteeism, drug use, pregnancy, and every evil known to youth.

They saw the high school program becoming a program for only elite athletes, only the specialists, with no room for their kids who would meet the standards of eligibility but lack the necessary athletic experience to make the team because they didn't

belong to a private club, go to all the right camps, or make a certain travel team in the third grade.

Did these parents overstate the problem? Yes. But there's some validity in their worries.

Those moms gave me a goal, and later my own sons personalized that goal: to work for this generation of high school students and the next, to preserve a place in our programs for all students, regardless of athletic ability, who meet all the essential standards of eligibility and who want a place on the team, and who want to participate in more than one school sport and activity.

“Providing opportunity for as many students as possible to participate as meaningfully as possible, and to do so with safety, sportsmanship, competitive equity and academic integrity—fundamentally the same objectives as we've had for decades—are wonderfully challenging goals . . .”

Can we have winning as a goal? You bet. Can we have rules that disqualify some kids? Yes; and as one of the last places in society where discipline is taught and consequences are learned, we must have rules that are enforced.

But we can do better; for example, enlarging volleyball varsities from 10 to 20 players, splitting 9th-grade basketball or JV soccer squads to give two teams 10 games each rather than one team 20 games, giving more kids playing time so that more will come out and stay out for the sport.

We can allow students to taste the variety of experience that school has to offer: academic and non-academic, athletic and non-athletic, to be a star in one activity and a substitute in

another, to be on-stage and back-stage, in solo and ensemble, experiencing winning and losing, success and failure.

Recalling that evening in the elementary school, and many similar conversations in years hence, I know that our work is not trivial. Providing opportunity for as many students as possible to participate as meaningfully as possible, and to do so with safety, sportsmanship, competitive equity and academic integrity—fundamentally the same objectives as we've had for decades—are wonderfully challenging goals for the end of this decade and the start of the next.

Not much conversion is necessary; just more commitment. ■

TIME WELL SPENT

DECEMBER 1998 - JANUARY 1999

(This is the concluding message at the MHSAA Update Meetings across Michigan in the fall of 1998.)

This message begins with a confession and apology. No, not like those of the nation's highest office-holder.

My confession and regret is that the featured topic of this Update Meeting really isn't all that important. A hot topic? You bet it is. But an important topic? No, not really. How schools qualify for the Football Playoffs is not a defining issue of school sports.

More important is what we did last month when more people gathered in Lansing than at any other time and

any other place to discuss sportsmanship. That's important; that's a defining issue of school sports.

More important is what we're going to do about baseball and softball bat performance and participant safety; what we're going to do about head protection for pole vaulters, skiers and even soccer players; what we're going to do about creatine, over-the-counter drugs and legal nutritional supplements that sometimes enhance athletic performance but at unknown risks to growing adolescent bodies. Health and safety. That's important; that's a defining issue of school athletics.

More important is what we're going to do about some of our eligibility regulations that occasionally frustrate more than facilitate schools' and students' goals and objectives. Scholarship; that is, scholarship in high school, not scholarships to college. That's important; and that's a defining issue of school sports.

More important is what we're going to do about those who keep pushing the envelope in terms of length of season, number of contests, extent of travel, including our own National Federation of State High School Associations which seems obsessed with conducting national competitive programs and promotions for schools in order to enhance its own prestige. The scope of school sports. That's important; that's a defining issue.

There are many conflicts and controversies that press in on us. But I urge all who care about school sports to find time, even make time, to focus on these fundamental issues.

If we do, educational athletics will be better in Michigan than in other places. School sports in Michigan will be better next year than this year, better next decade than this decade, better for the sons and daughters of our sons and daughters than the experience was for us.

School sports and this association are not perfect. School sports and this association have a lot we can do to improve.

But I am proud of what you do, and proud of where we are headed together.

Pure, wholesome, amateur, educational, inexpensive, local school athletics. That's what's entrusted to us.

That's our niche in the world of sports.

Watching the September chase to break Major League Baseball's home run record, I noticed in the crowd Hall of Famer Stan Musial. This reminded me

of the time when a rookie pitcher faced "Stan the Man" for the first time.

The young pitcher looked in for the sign, and his catcher signaled for a slider. The pitcher shook him off. Next, the catcher signaled for a curve, and the young hurler shook him off. Then the catcher signaled for a fast ball, and again the young hurler shook him off. Finally the catcher signaled for a change-up, and his pitcher again shook him off.

So the catcher called time-out and walked to the mound. "Look, kid," he said. "You've shaken off every pitch you have. What are you trying to do?"

The young pitcher looked at Stan the Man and then looked at the ball, and said, "I'm just trying to hold onto the ball as long as I can."

That's not bad advice. We face intimidating opposition in school sports. Let's hold onto what's pure and precious about school sports for as long as we can. ■

"Pure, wholesome, amateur, educational, inexpensive, local school athletics. That's what's entrusted to us. That's our niche in the world of sports."

PART II

**“AT NO TIME HAVE I BEEN MORE TROUBLED AND SADDENED
THAN WATCHING THE WORLD OF SPORTS,
TO WHICH I DEVOTE MY WORKING LIFE,
SAY, ‘NO THANK YOU’ TO MY SONS,
TO WHOM I DEDICATE MY ENTIRE LIFE.”**

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

APRIL 1991

We like to blame everybody else for the problems of sportsmanship in interscholastic athletics, but that's not fair. We like to say it's attitudes formed in youth sports and patterns observed at college and professional contests that create sportsmanship problems at high school events; and while those causes do contribute, that's a cop out.

I recently observed a ninth grade basketball game that shocked me into realizing that one of the major reasons that sportsmanship problems are perpetuated at high school events is that we give too little attention to the earliest levels of competition.

The contest was played before a small crowd of parents and freshman friends of the players. The score became lopsided and the winning team kept pouring it on, trying to reach 100 points. The starters were put back in the game, and their defense extended further and further out to harass the opponent, eventually becoming an aggressive full-court press, even though the pressing team had a 40-point lead late in the fourth quarter.

The leading team taunted; the losing team responded in kind: "In your face" antics, intentional bumps between players. There were rough fouls, even by the team which was ahead and should have been running

out the clock.

Neither coach made any statements or motions to control the players, even after one of the officials warned each bench that things were too rough and mouthy.

When, with less than a minute to play, a player sank a free-throw to make 99 points and then another to make 100 points, the crowd cheered with gusto that would befit winning a state title.

The result of this contest was to poison the relations between these teams for the next three years. And as the stakes go higher — to JV games, then varsity games, perhaps a clash for a conference championship or a berth in a regional tournament — this day will be remembered.

Freshman programs have an opportunity to remove the baggage of youth sports and counter the barrage of poor sportsmanship messages from college and professional sports; OR freshman programs can create a host of new and additional attitudes that will rear their ugly heads in later years of interscholastic athletics.

First impressions are lasting ones. Freshman programs need our best teachers, our strongest disciplinarians, our closest supervision, and our best officiating. They need our most acute attention and our best efforts. ■

"Freshman programs need our best teachers, our strongest disciplinarians, our closest supervision, and our best officiating."

MIDDLE SCHOOL ATHLETICS AT RISK

FEBRUARY 1992

(This editorial was written for and re-published from Midsports, a publication of the National Middle School Activities Association, November, 1991.)

The “No. 1” syndrome is a plague upon educational athletics; and ironically, it threatens most educational athletic programs which are least apt to show the symptoms of the disease. Middle school athletic programs are at risk.

We know that interscholastic athletic programs can be educational in both their means and ends. Surveys document that participants have higher grade point averages, lower dropout rates, better daily attendance, and fewer discipline problems than do non-participating students. They have higher GPA’s and lower rates of tobacco and alcohol use in-season versus out. They feel better about school.

Santee Ruffin, formerly of the National Association of Secondary School Principals’ Urban Services, told middle and high school activities advisors in Detroit last fall that school activities “promote academic achievement, equal access to opportunity, cultural understanding, and self-esteem, giving

youth a place to be loved, cared for and to belong . . . a place where they can make mistakes and still be accepted.”

But the good these programs accomplish and the high ideals for which

they aspire are increasingly overcome by the fever of winning contests and championships. Moreover, non-school youth programs which take teams all over the state, nation and globe for championships bring an expectation to interscholastic athletics which favors extrava-

gance for a fortunate few and leftovers for the majority in good times, and nothing at all for the majority when school districts face financial problems.

Fueled by the “No. 1” syndrome people often worry about and value the wrong things when it comes to interscholastic athletics.

For example, they worry about the eligibility of athletes more than the education of students. They worry about scholarships to college more than scholarship in school. They worry about the financial woes of schools and use middle school athletics as the whipping boy because the No. 1 syndrome causes people to value varsity programs more than jun-

“Here is where education prevails over entertainment in interscholastic athletics. Here is where philosophy of athletics is most in tune with the mission of the school. Here is where the taxpayer’s dollar is spent best.”

ior varsity, and high school more than middle school programs.

It is possible in the sub-varsity programs of our high schools (far more than in varsity programs where crowds and media bring pressure to win) and it should be and usually is pervasive in our middle school programs, that participation is more important than specialization, trying more important than winning, teamwork more important than individual honors, and teaching more important than titles and trophies.

At the middle school level, coaches should be required to look down the bench for substitutes without first looking up at the scoreboard. The scorebook is kept to see how many students played in the game, not how

many points any one player scored.

Here is where education prevails over entertainment in interscholastic athletics. Here is where philosophy of athletics is most in tune with the mission of the school. Here is where the taxpayer's dollar is spent best.

To the degree we introduce large tournaments and trophies into middle level programs, we damage the purity of educational athletics and the purpose of middle school programs. To the degree we cut middle level programs in the face of budget crises, we succumb to the No. 1 syndrome.

We must expose the No. 1 syndrome for the sickness it is: a cancerous growth that must be cut out of educational athletics before it leads to cutting out the most educational

WHAT IF EVERY KID MADE THE TEAM?

MAY 1992

(This article was printed in The Executive Educator, April 1992, published by the National School Board Association. It is an adaptation by the NSBA of an earlier work by the author.)

I believe — firmly and completely — that school sports should be committed to giving every kid a chance to play.

For 12 years a high school and college football and wrestling coach, my dad left coaching before I got into competitive school sports in the seventh grade. He was

never my coach, only my fan. He was a perfect dad for an athlete: despite his own success as an athlete and coach, he never pushed me or second-guessed me. He always supported me.

He was a tremendous example — so much so that I went into coaching after enough years as a player to know both the head trips and heartaches in sports. From all my experiences — as an athlete, a coach and, like my dad, an executive in high school athletic associations — I've developed a

“ . . . we should evaluate coaches, not on the basis of wins and losses, but on the number of dirty jerseys.”

philosophy of sports that boils down to the following three points.

1. The athletic arena is at least as pregnant with teachable moments as any curriculum classroom. Coaches are teachers. One of the nation's most celebrated school principals has made this observation: "Nowhere do you find it in education like you find it in school activities will you find teachers teaching what they want to teach to students who are learning what they want to learn, and both are willing to work hour after hour on their own time after school to make sure that everything that can be taught is taught and everything that can be learned is learned."

It's essential that school executives exercise great caution when making decisions that prevent kids who meet eligibility and citizenship requirements from benefitting from this dynamic kind of education.

2. Young people would rather play than watch other people play. School executives often make decisions that seem to ignore this truth. Schools create more opportunities for watchers than for players. The watchers eventually become nonwatchers. They lose interest because they don't play. In school after school, the best boosters are those who compete on other sports teams.

3. Those who played school sports when they were in school — and those whose children now play in school sports — are schools' strongest supporters. School executives seem to forget this self-evident truth. Schools curtail opportunities for kids, ignoring the public relations ramifications and the

terrible effect these decisions will have on the future community support of athletics, activities, and schools.

If I were designing a school athletic program, I'd make these points inviolable guidelines. I'd also make sure the athletic program was striving for maximum participation: maximum numbers of participants and maximum opportunities for each participant.

If you wanted to make sure every kid played, you'd require students to take part in a school-wide intramural program. Many private college preparatory schools already do this, and public schools could do it too, at least at the junior high or middle school level. It wouldn't work if you simply rolled the ball out on the floor and let any kind of skill level and conduct suffice. You'd have to include both instruction and competition.

If you wanted to ensure that every kid played, you wouldn't be afraid to implement no-cut policies. And you might seriously consider restricting students to playing at their own grade levels. Allowing a ninth-grader to play junior varsity or varsity sports, for example, signals that the ninth-grade program is second-class. It also keeps at least one 10th, 11th, or 12th-grader from playing in sports where the opportunities are limited.

And if you wanted to make sure every kid played, you'd find a way for every player to participate in a contest every week — and you'd give every player the experience of starting a contest at least once a season.

When I coached football almost 20 years ago, nobody was cut from the squad or stood around during prac-

tice. While the offensive starters worked out game plays, I would take the substitutes to work on defensive skills. We played every player in some game every week, and every player had a chance to start at least one game during the year. We had the biggest laundry bill in the conference because we argued we should evaluate coaches, not on the basis of wins and losses, but on the number of dirty jerseys.

In one junior varsity game, we started a boy at defensive tackle who was a completely inept player, we thought. We planned to take him out after a few downs but the other team didn't seem to notice his inability to play. Gradually, his confidence rose, and the boy began playing better and better. We kept him in the game. Afterward, the boy's father shook my hand and thanked me. The boy's mother said nothing, but tears of gratitude were in her eyes.

I don't remember if we won or lost that day, but I do remember that defensive tackle giving me a big hug in his muddy uniform and really cheering with the team for the first time all year. He felt he belonged to the team for the first time. His parents became ardent supporters of the school because they felt part of the program too. A little thing had made a huge difference in the lives of one boy, one family, and the school athletic program.

If you wanted to give everyone a chance to play, you'd implement a community-wide education program,

opening facilities and opportunities for adults to take part. The adults in your community would be healthier, and they'd be happier to vote Yes on school referenda. You'd also build an aquatic center and ensure that every student in the district was "drown-proofed." And you'd see the facility used from 6 a.m. until midnight for lifesaving, water safety, competitive teams, family swims, youth groups, and senior citizen aquatic aerobics.

If you wanted everyone to play, you'd launch a public relations program that would capture the attention of youngsters and keep the attention of adults. You'd have faculty games in the pre-season and alumni games during the holiday. You'd give banquets with motivational speakers for your booster club, and you'd preach your "every-kid-a-player" philosophy to others.

Some say the idea of giving everyone a chance to play is idealistic. Some say it would water down a school's athletic program and mire it in mediocrity. I think not.

I consider it a travesty that we turn 50 percent of a class away from athletics each year after the eighth grade. We start with 40 players in ninth-grade basketball, have 20 remaining as 10th graders, 10 as 11th graders, and only 5 as seniors. It's not the kids' fault. They want to play. It's our policies — our lack of ingenuity and energy. We're at fault. A few small decisions on our part can make a big positive difference. ■

SHOOTING OURSELVES IN THE FOOT

FEBRUARY 1995

As an athlete, I dreaded the days. Even when I was a returning starter, I approached with anxiety the page taped to the locker room door that would indicate who made the high school basketball team (and, by omission, who didn't).

As a coach, I refused to do it. I wasn't even tempted to cut anybody from my squads. But I was lucky. I coached football and golf, and the outdoor practice venues gave us enough room for almost limitless opportunities.

As a parent, I've cried over it. Watching my older son be cut from a non-school basketball program for junior high boys (he switched to wrestling in high school and had a fine career). Watching my younger son be cut four times from the travel soccer team (he made it on the fifth try and has started for his high school's freshman and junior varsity soccer teams during the two years after that).

At no time have I been more deeply troubled and saddened than watching the world of sports, to which I devote my working life, say, "No thank you" to my sons, to whom I dedicate my entire life.

As an administrator, I grieve over the process every year. I listen to complaints of parents. I watch them go from allies to enemies of high school sports.

"Why would we turn away boys and girls who would rather work and sweat after school than cruise and loiter?"

Why would we limit squad sizes for outdoor sports?

Why would we cut freshmen who haven't even matured yet and have only a little idea

what they might like or be good at?

Why would we not find room for a senior who has been on the team for three years and continues to have a good attitude and work ethic?

Why would we turn away boys and girls who would rather work and sweat after school than cruise and loiter?

Why do we persist in shutting out and turning against us the parents who would be our advocates today and the students who would be our advocates in the future?

Several years ago I purchased little plaques to give to those schools I encountered which administered "no-cut" policies. Positive reinforcement for them. Good therapy for me.

I'm sorry for a lot of students and their parents, and ultimately for their schools, that I can't do more. ■

PART III

“THE GREATEST DISAPPOINTMENTS I EXPERIENCE IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF EDUCATIONAL ATHLETICS ARE WHEN I OBSERVE THE PROGRAM MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO EDUCATE STUDENTS IN WAYS THAT WILL INSTILL POSITIVE CHARACTER TRAITS.”

CONCERNS FOR CONSEQUENCES

OCTOBER 1986

Given my background with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, it might concern those of you who serve in the public school setting that I would begin my first column for the *Bulletin* by making reference to teaching morality in our schools. Some folks think our troubles in schools are a result of our failure to teach morality.

While I certainly endorse the need for discussing ethical and moral choices in our schools, as well as discussing and demanding specific choices in our homes, I don't think the troubles of our schools or of society in general are the direct result of our failure to teach morality so much as it is our failure to demonstrate there are consequences to inappropriate actions.

In "the good ol' days" order was kept, not just because people prayed in school or taught morality (if that's possible), but because students understood there were consequences for breaking rules. Practical consequences. If you do this, that will happen. Definitely. And no fancy footwork by your folks or their lawyer would get you out of it.

It would have been unheard of for the parents of a boy or girl who was

disciplined out of one school to petition the administration of another school to waive the transfer regulation to allow the youngster to participate in athletics immediately at another

school, and then to engage an attorney and go to court when the second school performed its responsibility by saying "No, not for one semester." The student could have learned a tremendous lesson for life: you've got to live with the conse-

quences for your actions. Instead, what the youngster learned was that if you don't like the consequences of your actions, then sue.

I don't think we do the MHSAA, schools, or — most importantly — our students any good if we keep bailing them out of the boat of consequences.

During my first month on the job as MHSAA Executive Director, I heard from many people who wanted to bail out the boat for one younger person or another. Their emotional appeal was strong . . . when one took the short view of things. When one considered the long-term view that by withholding the student from competition we might teach him or her more than the lessons that would come in competition, the emotional

"I don't think the troubles of our schools or of society in general are the direct result of our failure to teach morality so much as it is our failure to demonstrate there are consequences to inappropriate actions."

appeal waned and the education appeal of enforcing the rules consistently increased.

Columnist William Raspberry wrote recently, “I do believe that rules clearly articulated and consistently enforced make a difference — even among people who believe the rules are unfair or the penalties too harsh.” One of the goals I have for my leadership of the MHSAA is a goal I hope you share for your leadership on the local level: to articulate clearly and enforce consistently the rules our authorities have developed for the conduct of our programs.

I’ve observed many state high school associations over the years and I know the MHSAA has some of the most carefully drawn eligibility rules and most lenient penalties in the United States. Rather than attacking the rules or even just criticizing them, we should be proudly upholding them. They are fair, pinpointed to address the abuse they were intended to curb, communicated clearly, and reviewed frequently. Most of all, they’re educationally sound; and applying them consistently is one of the best lessons we can teach the students we’re trying to serve. ■

ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST

APRIL 1998

Almost every week we learn of another college or professional athlete who has exploded in rage, abused a fan or friend, been busted or broken parole, been stopped for speeding or DUI.

There is no wonder why. Among many reasons, the greatest is this: we taught them to behave this way.

Sometimes the positive character traits that high school sports teach are overwhelmed by the extravagant attention given to athletes by the media, college recruiters, ranking

services, agents, promoters and sporting equipment/apparel companies. Good kids begin to believe the hype, thinking they’re not only above the crowd, but above the law. From self-

“Good kids begin to believe the hype, thinking they’re not only above the crowd, but above the law.”

confident to self-centered and self-serving and, occasionally, to serving a sentence in a cell.

Alexander Wolf in a *Sports Illustrated* article on February 23, 1998, used these terms. He said some athletes have “an outsized sense of entitlement that too often sets them adrift.”

This year's Heisman Trophy winner demanded first class airplane tickets for his mother, girlfriend and nephew from a nonprofit organization that named him "Player of the Year." He was described as "an All-American headache." Said an organizer of the event, "Every once in a while you get an athlete who the money goes right to their head and all of a sudden you can't deal with him."

College coaches complain, but contribute. About recruiting, one college basketball coach said, as quoted by Wolf: "It's always been hard. Now it's gotten demeaning." He means demeaning to coaches, not to players, who continue to be coddled and become more twisted in their thinking about their place not only in sports but in life.

Often quoted is Sonny Vaccaro who, when he worked for NIKE eight years ago, describe the recruiting underworld as "a cesspool, and we started the process." Nevertheless, now working for Adidas, Vaccaro helps to poison the pool more as the two giant companies compete against others to buy college teams, high school teams and AAU teams to win

the loyalty of long-shot future pros.

Rather than fight this, college and professional organizations seem to contribute. They allow their public relations departments and television packagers to promote and sensationalize the accomplishments of individual athletes much more than teams. It's Jordan vs. Barkley, rather than Bulls vs. Suns. They use them for organizational gain — a greater gate and larger television viewing audience.

At the high school level, we can't, don't and won't exploit individuals for corporate gain. We'll promote the teams and their teamwork, not the individual stars and their stats. We won't be connected with all-star games or national championships. We'll make more of sportsmanship than state and national records. We'll make a bigger deal out of scholarships in high school than scholarships to college.

At the local team level, we need to build the self-esteem of our subs and temper the self-esteem of the stars, providing them no breaks, making for them no exceptions, keeping them from becoming the prima donnas who believe the world exists to serve them rather than vice versa.■

WHAT A PROBLEM!

AUGUST 1994

The greatest disappointments I experience in the administration of educational athletics are when I observe

the program miss the opportunity to educate students in ways that will instill positive character traits. It hap-

pens in little ways every day; and sometimes it happens in really big ways when we fail to require people to accept the consequences of their actions.

During and immediately following a Regional Tennis match this spring, a student displayed the kind of sportsmanship that offended everyone's sense of appropriate behavior. There was no question he behaved badly, although the student and parents had many excuses for the behavior.

While the player was not disqualified at the time, his coach, athletic director and principal agreed the player should be withheld from the Final Tournament, consistent with suspensions applied to other students in other sports at other times. The parents appealed the decision and the central office overturned the building level decision because "missing the Final

Tournament was too severe a penalty." If it had been a regular season contest, not the MHSAA Finals, the student would have been suspended.

So, what's the lesson here? There are consequences for inappropriate behavior so long as it's not an important event for the student and school. What a lesson.

And what a problem! For this lesson teaches that exceptions will be made for better players and bigger events, that standards of acceptable behavior are related to the persistence of the parents and the prestige of the competition.

The problem is that if people are not held accountable for their behavior in high school athletics, whenever will they? The problem is that if people are not held accountable for their acts — i.e., fail to develop character — a world going bad is going to get there faster. ■

“. . . if people are not held accountable for their behavior in high school athletics, whenever will they?”

TALK TO THEM ABOUT LITTLETON

AUGUST 1999

Three days after the tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, a retired athletic administrator whom I respect greatly and listen to intently, called me to say this:

“You have an opportunity to speak to student-athletes in this state and

across the country. Talk to them about Littleton.”

This administrator wanted me to convey to athletes that they were not a part of the many and complex causes of the Columbine carnage, but they play a small part of the solution to

help assure such craziness doesn't occur closer to home.

The administrator was referencing some of the media reports that suggested the youthful killers took offense to the "jocks." Valid or not, these suggestions provide another wake-up call for those who claim that school-sponsored sports are healthy for the participants, school and community.

As a result, part of my conversations with student-athletes this year and the heart of my message to team captains in 1999-00, will be this:

- Break down the walls, real or perceived, between the athletes of your schools and other students. Avoid cliques limited to team members or even athletes in general.
- When you walk the school halls and shopping malls, greet fellow students warmly, regardless of their involvement in school sports or other activities. Let them know that you know they exist.
- Become more sensitive to the needs of others, especially those who are different than you. Appreciate that while you may be more gifted in some things, other students are more gifted in other things. Show a genuine interest in those things.
- Understand that you are not the

"A student involved in such an experience at this could not help but provide glue and grace to a student body."

center of the universe. Accept that it is your role to serve others, and not the other way around.

- Don't condescend, but concentrate on the rich worth of other people. Seek them out. Involve them. Enter into their worlds and invite them into yours until such time as it is difficult to recognize different worlds in your school and community.

I believe this goal for the interscholastic athletic program, embraced by every administrator, participant and parent, would help us: That every participant be involved in academic and non-academic matters, athletic and non-athletic activities, be a star in one thing and a substitute in another, be on stage and backstage, in solo and ensemble, experiencing both winning and losing.

A student involved in such an experience as this could not help but provide glue and grace to a student body.

No student-athlete anywhere is remotely responsible for the massacre in Littleton, Colorado. But student-athletes everywhere have an opportunity to be a small part of an environment that assures such a tragedy is not repeated where they live, study and play. Talk to them. ■

PART IV

**“AS WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH TOUGH ETHICAL DECISIONS,
LET’S IMAGINE OUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS PEERING OVER OUR
SHOULDERS. FOR MY PART, I WANT TO LIVE MY LIFE SO
MY SON WILL NEVER SAY TO ME, ‘BUT DAD,
I THOUGHT YOU WERE BETTER.’ ”**

EXAMPLES, NOT EXCEPTIONS

NOVEMBER 1990

A middle-aged pastor offered a confession to his congregation one Sunday. He confessed that earlier in the week, when he had stopped by the church for a few minutes to offer encouragement to those rehearsing for a Christmas pageant, he had parked in the “No Parking” zone in front of the church.

It probably doesn’t surprise you that there were no gasps of surprise or groans in indignation. “Big deal,” was the attitude of most who heard the confession.

But the pastor pressed on. “One of you was kind enough to put a note in my mailbox to remind me there was no parking where I parked. I could rationalize: ‘It was only for a few moments, and only to encourage my flock.’ I could prioritize: ‘I’m the pastor, and the restriction doesn’t apply to me.’”

He continued, “The rationalization is bad; the prioritization is worse. When I start putting expediency above principle or myself above others, I fail to be the leader you deserve.”

That pastor grasped what many of us sometimes forget: that as leaders, we are not to be exceptions to rules but examples of what is right.

Athletics provide us with tremendous opportunities to apply that lesson. Coaches must never be exceptions to codes of conduct but the very best

examples of the very best conduct we want from other athletes. The same is true for administrators.

There are a dozen different ways to put it. “Actions speak louder than words” is the cliché. Author/teacher Dr. Howard Hendricks wrote in *Characteristics of a Leader*: “The greatest teaching anyone does is done not by the contents he gives out but by the qualities he lives out.”

We can expect no one to perform well a task we would not do ourselves. If we don’t prepare fully for practices and games, will our assistant coaches? If we don’t follow rules well, will our athletes? If we don’t show good sportsmanship, will our fans? ■

“. . . as leaders, we are not to be exceptions to rules but examples of what is right.”

FATHER-SON TALK

FEBRUARY 1991

My older son has become a high school athlete. His mother and I are really enjoying being the parents of a high school athlete. His first two coaches have been ideal: extremely competent in teaching skills, focussed on education and broad participation, and obviously concerned about students' physical and emotional well-being. In our home, because of these coaches, the interscholastic athletic experience represents all the good that I've written and talked about for twenty years.

Recently, however, my son confessed "I don't know what I would do, Dad, if the MHSAA had to penalize my school for breaking a rule." The expression of his face and voice revealed his worry was real, something that had been bothering him for more than that moment.

Frankly, I had difficulty relating to his worry. My father was the director of the high school athletic association in another state and I played high school sports, but I never worried about our school violating rules or being penalized.

Perhaps that's because my wife is correct: I have difficulty relating to a lot that our kids go through. But

more likely it's a sign of the times. During my high school years, it wasn't a daily occurrence to read in newspapers or see on television that one university or another was being investigated or penalized. And it was much rarer that high school athletic associations handed out penalties.

But times have changed. Television took over college sports, universities are playing for high stakes, cheating results, and the reach of these influences touches high school athletics. Rules get broken and penalties are assessed. And someday, my son worries, it will happen at his school. And, in the typical adolescent frame of mind, he worries about what that will mean to him.

Joking, I told him he could transfer; but he would be ineligible for a semester. He didn't laugh.

Then I told him seriously, don't worry about it. I told him the MHSAA would ask his school to enforce the rules and impose the penalties, without exception. I told him he would be much more humiliated and embarrassed if I lost my job for overlooking violations, making exceptions or playing favorites than if I brought controversy to our house for performing my responsibilities fully,

"The shame is not in infractions of rules, for they sometimes occur innocently or because someone lied to school officials. Shame only comes when schools purposefully break rules or fail to report infractions."

faithfully and fairly. The shame for him, I told him, would be if the MHSAA does not do its job, never from doing the job.

This is one of the messages the MHSAA tries to convey to schools. The shame is not in infractions of rules, for they sometimes occur innocently or because someone lied to school officials. Shame only comes when schools purposefully break rules or fail to report infractions.

Another message for my son, one which I hope is not lost on school people who read this, is to quote from Tom Peters (*Thriving on Chaos*), "There is no such thing as a minor lapse of integrity." I don't think the MHSAA can overlook investigating or penalizing a violation because a

school is nearby, urban or rural and preserve its integrity; nor can a school overlook reporting an inadvertent violation by an administrator, coach or athlete and claim its integrity.

Former Wayne State University Law School professor Michael Josephson is fond of describing a scene in the Arthur Miller play "*All my Sons*", where a father tries to excuse his own cheating by claiming everybody does it. His son rebukes him by saying, "But Dad, I thought you were better."

As we are confronted with tough ethical decisions, let's imagine our sons and daughters peering over our shoulders. For my part, I want to live my life so my son will never say to me, "But Dad, I thought you were better." ■

PREDICTING HONESTY

DECEMBER 1993-JANUARY 1994

Many of you have heard me tell the story about a junior varsity football coach who saw his own receiver step out of bounds before catching a pass and scoring the go-ahead touchdown. No official had seen it; but the coach notified the referee, who cancelled the touchdown. It was late in the game and the coach's team lost by a single point.

After the game in the locker room, the coach told all of the players assem-

bled, that he just had to believe that the business of learning was more important than the business of winning in junior varsity football. And he added "Men, today we learned that honesty is not a sometime thing, but an all-the-time thing; we play by the rules all the time, not just when we get caught."

Recent events have made me think a lot about that day.

At this writing, the MHSAA has processed 20 cases of ineligible ath-

letes participating in interscholastic athletic events during the fall of 1993. The vast majority of these cases have been self-discovered and self-reported, and the penalty of forfeiture was self-imposed. The MHSAA just got a letter from the school indicating the error and providing a copy of the notices of forfeitures to opposing teams.

When the activity is at the varsity level, the stakes are higher than at the sub-varsity level. When varsity football is involved, the stakes seem higher still because the cost of a forfeiture may be

loss of a place among the Regional qualifiers of the Football Playoffs.

So far this year, the MHSAA has processed six cases involving varsity football. In two cases, the violations were self-discovered. In four cases, the violations were self-reported. In five cases where the violation was undisputed, the penalty of forfeiture was appealed; and in all five cases where the penalty of forfeiture was appealed, the penalty was upheld. In one case, a second appeal was requested.

The second appeal was based on the fact that the violation was self-discovered, self-reported, and committed by a player who made limited contributions in lopsided victories. None of this was unique.

But most of all, the people in the community argued that by not making an exception for their case, the MHSAA was (1) discouraging other schools from reporting their viola-

tions in the future; and (2) telling their kids that honesty doesn't pay. Let's examine these arguments.

By not making an exception, it was argued, the Executive Committee was discouraging other schools from reporting their violations in the future; in other words, discouraging honesty. But it is the experience of MHSAA

leadership that it is more likely, rather than less, that consistency of enforcement encourages self-reporting.

It is more likely that I will report my violations and accept my forfeitures

if I know that you will report your violations and receive forfeitures in the future. In other words, if I know you will receive the same result I receive, without uncertainty, I will step forward.

All those who have come before to self-report their accidental and self-discovered violations expect that this year's violations will be treated like last year's violations. All those who have come before would feel betrayed if this year's violators were treated differently than they were. This unpredictability, this betrayal, would poison the MHSAA and discourage its self-policing principles.

We should not be misled: consistent application of rules and penalties doesn't encourage dishonesty. Consistent application of rules and penalties reinforces honesty.

In 1991, the Michigan Supreme Court stated: "We find that the inter-

"We should not be misled: consistent application of rules and penalties doesn't encourage dishonesty. Consistent application of rules and penalties reinforces honesty."

ests of uniformity and predictability justify even-handed application” of the forfeiture rule.

Legally, organizationally, and from the standpoint of promoting honesty, uniform enforcement of penalties is the best approach.

The second argument advanced by the community was that by not making an exception for their case, the MHSAA was telling their kids that honesty doesn't pay.

If the community allows that to be the lesson learned, it certainly will be. But the situation is ripe for a better lesson: that honest is its own reward; that it isn't really honesty if there's some prize; that the true test of honesty is what a person does when no one is watching; and the truer test still is when it takes courage to be honest, when there is a cost. Not a prize for being honest, but a cost.

It doesn't take courage for a coach to call a player out of bounds if his team is way ahead or way behind. It

takes courage, and it's really honesty, if the team will lose the game as a result of making the call.

It doesn't take courage for administrators to report a violation when their team lost the game in which the ineligible student played, or it's on the sub-varsity level, or even on the varsity level in most sports at most times. It takes courage — and it's really honesty — if the report will disqualify the team from the MHSAA tournament.

If a community gives honesty this definition, then their kids win more than games and playoff berths. Their kids win character. Their kids win a value for living that is undiminished by exceptions, qualifications and appeals.

Real honesty doesn't come with a prize. Far more often, honesty comes with a cost. And the MHSAA is grateful that most of the coaches and administrators in most of its schools have the courage to do what is expected by all voluntary members of this self-policing organization. ■

ASK THE IMPORTANT QUESTION FIRST

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1994

An article by Russell Gough in the June/July, 1994 issue of the National Sports Law Institute's publication *For The Record* has me thinking. Mr. Gough, Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Ethics at Pepperdine University, described the possibility that the National Collegiate Athletic Associa-

tion's expanding manual of rules and regulations is “strangling” ethical thinking and actions by those who conduct intercollegiate athletic programs on the local level.

It's the law of unintended consequences at work again. Intending to prohibit unethical behaviors, the

NCAA also limits ethical thinking. Athletic administrators, coaches and athletes substitute “Is this a permitted action?” for the question “Is this a proper action?”

They ask “Is this allowed by the NCAA Manual?” and they stop asking “Is this the right thing to do?”

Professor Gough writes: “Ongoing attempts by the NCAA to legislate behavior comprehensively are clearly fostering myopic, legalistic attitudes that harm and hinder thoughtful ethical judgment.”

The NCAA Manual’s 439 pages dwarfs the *MHSAA Handbook* in size, weight and technicality; but because the MHSAA shares a similar purpose, we might wonder if we’re headed in the same direction, vulnerable to the same pitfall.

Professor Gough writes: “The past several years have seen college athletic programs increasingly object to being punished for any conduct that is not expressly prohibited by the rules.”

MHSAA staff knows from the telephone calls from some of our constituents that this “If it’s not against the written rules, it’s okay” thinking exists on the high school level too.

“Ethical behavior transcends mere rule-following,” according to Gough. And of course, he’s right.

When we only look to the *MHSAA Handbook* for guidance as to correct actions, we’re in deep trouble. There

“When we only look to the *MHSAA Handbook* for guidance as to correct actions, we’re in deep trouble.”

are legions of unethical, illegal and dangerous activities which the *MHSAA Handbook* does not address for one of three good reasons:

1. The action is so obviously wrong that it doesn’t need MHSAA mention (like “Thou shalt not kill . . . or steal”).
 2. The action is none of the MHSAA’s business (the MHSAA has limited authority, related to the tournaments it sponsors; and there are many more aspects of interscholastic athletics which school districts either do not want to coordinate with the MHSAA or cannot legally delegate to a private association).
 3. The action is mere “detail” which doesn’t deserve MHSAA mention (if all were addressed by the MHSAA, it would require the MHSAA to have a huge *Handbook* and enforcement staff, which would be both intrusive and counter-productive).
- The MHSAA spends a lot of time and money on meetings and mailings to help our constituents know its few rules and regulations for interscholastic athletics. But we would hope that on the way to picking up the *MHSAA Handbook* or National Federation sport rule book to check a regulation or rule, our constituents will have already examined in their hearts and minds the question, “Is this the right thing to do?”■

PART V

“ . . . THERE ARE LOTS OF SUPERFICIAL, DON'T-REALLY-MATTER ISSUES. ATHLETIC ADMINISTRATORS — EDUCATORS — MUST LOOK FOR THE DEEPER, MORE POWERFUL AND UNCHANGING ISSUES . . . LET'S NOT BE THE GENERATION OF LEADERS WHO GAVE UP ON THE CRITICAL ISSUES.”

THE CRITICAL ISSUES

NOVEMBER 1988

The critical issues of interscholastic athletics in this state are the same as in every other state. They are the same issues that were important ten years ago, and the same issues that will be important ten years from now. These are the fundamental issues. These are the issues that strike at the heart of high school athletics and define the difference between high school athletics and purely recreational sport, between high school athletics and major college athletics, between high school athletics and Olympic sports, and between high school athletics and professional sports.

One is amateurism. Attention to those matters that would tarnish the amateur ethic of school sports. It's far more than adherence to a \$15 awards rule.

Another of those issues is education. Attention to those matters that would make people question that athletics make a positive contribution to the education of young people. It's far more than passing four subjects, or achieving a minimum grade point average for athletic eligibility.

Another is sportsmanship. Attention

to the environment at our events, and understanding that poor sportsmanship cannot be justified in an educational setting. Understanding that good sportsmanship is far more than

not doing certain things at athletic events; it's also doing certain other things which make opponents feel like special guests and officials feel like respected colleagues.

Another is coaches. Attention to their preparation and performance because we understand they are the critical link in the educational process of high school

athletics. If they mistreat athletes, they negate the good decisions we make and programs we implement. If coaches treat athletes exceedingly well, they redeem the bad decisions we make.

Another is specialization. Understanding that single-sport athletes almost always reduce their educational and athletic opportunities. In more than 99 cases out of 100, specialization in a single sport is tunnel vision that hurts rather than helps an athlete, no matter how gifted he or she is.

Only a fraction of 1% of high school athletes play college sports, much less

“These are the issues that strike at the heart of high school athletics and define the difference between high school athletics and purely recreational sport, between high school athletics and major college athletics, between high school athletics and Olympic sports, and between high school athletics and professional sports.”

get college scholarships. Far fewer still receive professional contracts and far fewer again reach the Olympics.

With rare exception, specialization hurts high school athletes, and educators need to say so. And the more gifted the athlete is, the more clearly we need to communicate the danger to that athlete.

And, of course, one lasting issue is integrity. Honesty in sport. The guts to live by the rules personally and police the program professionally.

We have hired an associate director to assist in the investigation of violations and the enforcement of MHSAA regulations; but if we have to hire one more person for these tasks, it indicates we have lost the battle of integrity. We can't legislate it. We can't enforce it. It must come from

within — from within the institution and from within each individual at each institution.

The president of a small Christian college in the rural midwest proudly told the parents of an incoming freshman class one year, "We're 37 miles from the nearest sin." That president missed the truth that violations of any codes — whether religious, ethical or athletic — are not something to be dealt with "out there," 37 miles away; but inside each and every one of us.

The current group of administrators in schools across this state and the nation are in an eleventh-hour battle to maintain the integrity of what has been the finest youth sports program in the country; high school athletics. Let's not be the generation of leaders who gave up on the critical issue. ■

FOCUS ON THE FUNDAMENTALS

AUGUST 1989

As we contemplate what our focus should be for interscholastic athletics in Michigan during the 1990's, I submit that we would be best served by emphasizing the fundamentals: core philosophies, basic programs, essential services.

There are two reasons why this focus is important in Michigan. First, Michigan still has a lot it can do to be achieving all it can on the critical issues and in the basic services. And secondly, interscholastic programs across the nation show signs of straying from the

fundamentals, so constant vigilance will be required by Michigan educators to avoid becoming distracted in favor of tarnished philosophies and tangential programs and services.

Here is where I believe the Michigan High School Athletic Association would be best served to devote the best portion of its resources during the 1990's.

1. Even more than during the past three years, we must focus on athletic officials. We need to increase the

quantity, with special focus on women and minorities. We need to improve the quality, with special focus on local officials associations, an improved rating system, and implementation of a true evaluation program.

The 11,000 men and women who serve as interscholastic officials are basic parts of the interscholastic program and deserve all the resources of staff, equipment and printing we can muster.

2. Our in-service program for coaches must grow to at least equal what we're doing for athletic officials. During 1989-90, 243 coaches completed the Program of Athletic Coaches' Education (PACE). The ambitious schedule for 1989-90 will allow us to involve almost 1,000 coaches in this training.

This emphasis is completely appropriate, for coaches are the delivery system of high school athletics. The health, safety and education of athletes is in their hands.

3. The 1990's should continue to have emphasis on and improvement in sportsmanship. In Michigan, good sportsmanship is not a subject referred to a special committee. Good sportsmanship is not even a campaign. Good sportsmanship is the essence of what we are about in interscholastic athletics. If we don't have good sportsmanship, we really do not accomplish anything worth promoting and protecting in our program.

As we have said often, sportsmanship has the potential of elevating humanity in times, places and peoples we don't even know through students we are teaching and coaching in our programs today. As we affect them for

good sportsmanship, they have the potential of carrying good sportsmanship to all races, creeds and walks of life — far distant from the arena of interscholastic athletics.

The first president of the MHSAA said in 1933: "Winning is for a day; it's a passing pleasure. The practice of sportsmanship gives flavor to all relationships and ensures a life of perpetual satisfaction."

That statement was correct 56 years ago, and it's not overstated today. Our efforts to improve sportsmanship in Michigan must not stop when the booing stops or the vulgarities vanish. Local school districts and leagues in Michigan must continue to raise the standards of sportsmanship through the education of their constituents and the enforcement of those standards.

4. Across the nation during the 1990's we will see an increase of commercialization of high school sports; and we in Michigan will have to use our common sense and conscience to avoid being swept up in the sometimes compromising business. What is happening in some states makes my toes curl; and it's going to get worse there and expand to other states during the 1990's. Michigan's conservative approach to corporate involvement will look even more so in the 1990's.

Hopefully, the 1990's will be a time not of redefining high school athletics, but of reminding people of what high school athletics is supposed to be and of what college athletics became when it forgot or abandoned its primary purpose — which is the education of the students more than the entertainment of the public. ■

THE LIMITATIONS OF PROGRESS

AUGUST 1990

(Excerpts from comments by the executive director to the MHSAA Representative Council at the opening of its meetings, May 6-8, 1990.)

We are here to make progress, we hope, in the administration of interscholastic athletics in Michigan. But progress is an elusive thing. Sometimes what we think is progress turns out not to be progress. Sometimes what appears to be steps forward turn out to be steps backward.

For example, once there was something called The Telephone Company. This phone company offered just one model telephone, but if your phone broke, a man came to your house to fix it. Then someone said that wasn't right: there ought to be lots of telephone companies. There became a multitude of phone companies, they offered many kinds of phones and oodles of services, most of which you don't need and don't know how to use. But now, when your phone doesn't work, no one comes to your home to fix it. And this was called progress?

The "good old days" were never as good as we now think of them; but progress has had its limitations.

The world of high school athletic administration provides many examples, and here are two: one national, one local.

"The only adjective worth pursuing in interscholastic athletics is best, and only if 'best' means retaining most the historic educational values which were to have been at the foundation of high school athletics and were to direct their form and function within our schools."

In the late 1970's I participated in revising National Federation of State High School Association policies and procedures for approving interstate competition. The intent was to allow individual state high school associations to approve a wider range of events without burdening the National Federation with paperwork. The result was the steady growth in the number and size of large regional and even national-scope tournaments. The change in policies and procedures didn't cause these results, but they allowed the results. Progress?

The Michigan example is recent. In response to the requests from many schools for more limitations on summer activities by coaches and athletes, the MHSAA opened the process to discussion and debate. When the MHSAA staff suggested that what was needed was not more rules but enforcement of the tough limitations that already existed in the language of the rules, the tough language was relaxed. Even more recently, schools

have been allowed to be the conduit for funding summer athletic activities, institutionalizing what many school people opposed and wanted changed: too much school in non-school summer programs. Progress?

The good old days of sports in America weren't as pure or romantic as we are tempted to remember them; but for all of our advances in athletic equipment, facilities and performance, the quality of experience for individual coaches and athletes may have declined.

If you listen to coaches complain about stress, specialization and summer demands, and if you observe what's going on in the weight rooms and "open gyms" of our schools, if you visit summer camps and leagues, and if you read about the history of high school athletics across the country and in Michigan, you can get darned discouraged about what's happening in school athletics.

My reading has included every *Bulletin* in the MHSAA's 66-year history — not a word-for-word reading, but a page-by-page reading — as well as every contemporary book on trends in society and sports that I can find in bookstores and libraries. There are two inescapable conclusions: one humbling, one disheartening.

First, there are very few if any new ideas in sports administration. Almost everything we think up today has been thought about before. Second, there are only a few moments in time — really split seconds in the long history of school sports — when the qualitative slide in the school sports experience can be stopped; and there

are fewer opportunities still to make substantial improvement in interscholastic athletics. The bad-to-worse trend can be slowed, but it can't be stopped. The decline can be resisted, but not reversed.

As these conclusions have become increasingly obvious to me, I have put away the tempting plans to make the MHSAA first in this or biggest in that. "Biggest" is of little importance if an activity is irrelevant. "First" is of even less importance if the activity is misdirected.

The only adjective worth pursuing in interscholastic athletics is best, and only if "best" means retaining most the historic educational values which were to have been at the foundation of high school athletics and were to direct their form and function within our schools.

That's how I hope this Representative Council will attack the agenda before it. Ask "Will my vote retain or restore the historic educational values of high school athletics in Michigan?"

Preventative action is better than corrective action: it's easier and less controversial. Once you let the horse out of the barn, it's hard to get the animal back in. Now is not the time, if there ever has been or will be a time, to loosen the reigns on interscholastic athletics. With good reason, the counterpart to this Representative Council in many other states is called the "board of control." Never have high school athletics needed more control than today.

I urge you to resist every temptation to give up because a rule is tough to administer or unpopular to en-

force. No, you can't legislate ethics, integrity or morality. But it does no good to eliminate standards which tend to support high ideals. I urge you to tighten schools' control of eligibility, competition and conduct. No other organization will.

I urge you to seize every opportunity — no other organization has this primary purpose — to shelter and protect the interscholastic program from the abuses and excesses of outside forces, as well as inside sources. Outside forces such as shoe companies, colleges and television. Inside sources such as those who see only one sport, not all sports, or who see only sports, and not the total curriculum of the

school we are supposed to serve.

I urge you to be so suspicious of changes by close votes that you will automatically entertain motions to reconsider them. Rarely does sound policy follow change by slim margins. If a proposal won't definitely improve things and is not overwhelmingly supported by this Council, leave things alone until you are sure they can be improved by the proposal before you. This Council is representative of our membership . . . all aspects of interscholastic leadership in schools of all sizes, types and places. If this Council isn't convinced about a change, the membership won't be convinced either.■

NURTURING THE SOUL OF SCHOOL SPORTS

DECEMBER 1997-JANUARY 1998

(Excerpts from an MHSAA Update Meeting. October 15, 1997, Pontiac, Michigan.)

Change is inevitable and, for the Michigan High School Athletic Association, comes in at least these ways.

There will be external forces. For example, litigation and legislation will challenge our policies and procedures and, even when we prevail, cause us to change some thought processes or operations.

Change will also come from the inside. For example, we have a new building which has led to new policies and procedures and staff assignments.

We will soon have some retirements and that will lead to reorganization of staff.

And technology is changing us both from outside and in. For example, soon all of our publications will be on our web site, someday up-to-date lists of officials will be available, and right now most of the MHSAA forms can be downloaded on the Internet.

So change is all around us and greatly affecting us.

But while we will change many things, we must not — and this is the heart of this message — we must not change the soul of school sports.

Coaches come and go, athletic directors come and go, principals come and go, superintendents come and go, school board members come and go, MHSAA staff come and go, leagues come and go, classes and divisions of tournaments come and go. All are important. But they are not the soul of school sports.

What is? The core values — concerns such as scholarship, sportsmanship, safety, and the scope of our program.

By scholarship we mean scholarship in high school, not scholarships to college. We mean that academics come first. We mean that athletics support the educational mission of schools and complete the education of many students. We mean that interscholastic athletics are educational athletics, not merely recreational sport and not primarily for entertainment. And those who see this differently, and those who want to change this, they threaten the soul of school sports. They can't be allowed to change us.

By sportsmanship we mean the atmosphere that surrounds our events. We mean the conduct of players, coaches and spectators; and right now the major challenge is the spectator. We have all the rules we need for high school athletes, and the best behaved athletes in Michigan on any level are those who participate in our high school programs.

Right now, the challenge is in the stands. Athletes would be ejected from this day of competition and the next

for using once the words and gestures that fans use routinely, and they threaten the soul of school sports. They can't be allowed to change us.

By safety we mean the health and welfare of participants. We mean protecting them from injuries. We mean providing first aid and emergency care. We mean promoting healthy lifestyles. By safety we mean nothing less than annual physical examinations and nothing less than coaches who know CPR. We mean healthy

weight control policies in wrestling and, for all of our athletes, nutrition education and the teaching of life skills to help students avoid drug abuse, including tobacco and alcohol use. And anyone who would put honors before health, or championships before caring for kids, they threaten the soul of school sports. They can't be allowed to change us.

By scope we mean the limitations of our program. How many, how long, how early, how late, how far? School sports — educational athletics — addresses those questions more than sports on any other level by any other sponsor. How many games is too many? How far is too distant travel? Without apologies, we put borders around our program to avoid the excesses that come from other programs, including to programs involving much younger children.

We attempt to avoid extremes and abuses. We attempt to avoid directions which inflate egos and turn out

“Let changes abound all around us, but not the core concerns of scholarship, sportsmanship, safety and the scope of our programs.”

athletes who leave us thinking they're the center of the universe and that the world should serve them rather than vice versa. And those who would relax too far amateur and awards rules, travel limitations, prohibitions against all-star events and national championships, they threaten the soul of school sports. They can't be allowed to prevail (even if they are the National Federation of State High School Associations). They can't be allowed to change us.

The soul of school sports is local, where you work. The soul of school sports is amateur. It's educational.

Let changes abound all around us, but not the core concerns of scholarship, sportsmanship, safety and the scope of our programs.

Some time ago, I watched a National Geographic television show about the North Atlantic Ocean. Beautiful photography. One scene was of icebergs flowing in one direction while other icebergs flowed in the opposite direction. The explanation given to the viewer was that the icebergs moving in one direction had very shallow bases and were being carried along by the shallow surface currents of the North Atlantic Ocean. While the other icebergs, moving in the opposite direction, had very deep bases and were being moved along by

the deeper and more powerful and unchanging currents of the North Atlantic Ocean.

In athletic administration, there are lots of superficial, don't-really-matter issues. Athletic administrators — educators — must look for the deeper, more powerful and unchanging issues, sink deeply into them and let them carry us through the daily controversies and temporary hot topics.

Thomas Jefferson said, "In matters of style, swim with the current. In matters of principle, stand like a rock." We must stand firm, even against a rushing current, when the issues really matter.

Legendary Alabama football coach Bear Bryant was once lecturing his team about the importance of going to class. "I don't want no dumbbells on this team." said the Bear. "If there's a dumbbell in this room, I wish he would stand up." At which point, star quarterback Joe Namath stood up.

"Joe," exclaimed the Bear. "How come you're standing up? You're not dumb."

Answered Namath: "I know, coach. I just hate to see you standing there all by yourself."

Let's stand up and stand like a rock for the issues that really matter in educational athletics. And let's stand together. ■

THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

FEBRUARY 2000

Recently I was asked what I foresaw for interscholastic athletics and the Michigan High School Athletic Association in the new year/decade ahead.

I responded that there was no policy or program that I had a burning desire to initiate. Rather, I hoped the MHSAA and its constituents would focus in the future on the same critical issues that have defined school sports throughout the past hundred years.

If so, we would give continuing special attention to scholarship, sportsmanship, safety and the scope of our programs. We would give most attention to policies and programs that support the academic mission of schools, encourage a civil and respectful environment for competition, promote the physical well-being of participants, and maintain limits on travel, seasons and out-of-season activities.

I hope at all times and in all ways we will continue to focus on what the *MHSAA Handbook* lists as our two primary purposes: (1) assisting schools in their regulation of interscholastic athletics, and (2) conducting post-season tournaments for their benefit.

I hope that above all others we will continue to focus on two primary constituents: (1) coaches, reaching even more coaches with an even broader and deeper education program than

the Program of Athletic Coaches' Education is providing today, and (2) officials, equipping local officials associations and their trainers and assignors to do an even better job of recruiting, training, assigning and evaluating contest officials.

Doing the essentials better is what I hope for in the year 2000 and beyond. Not thinking outside the box, but remaining in it, remembering our first and fundamental reasons for being, and delivering the very finest services that support those purposes.

It is possible that by thinking outside the box, organizations forget about their reasons for being. In interscholastic athletics, we would be well served to think inside the box.

In sports we learn we must compete within the confines of endlines and sidelines. Go beyond the boundary lines and in most sports you're out of play, where you can't score and can't win.

If school sports will secure a victory for its future – meaning, school sports continue to be a tool for schools to reach and motivate young people in an educational setting – it will not occur from out of bounds. It will occur because we stayed within prescribed boundaries: local, amateur, educational, non-commercial, sportsmanlike and physically beneficial. ■

“It is possible that by thinking outside the box, organizations forget about their reasons for being.”

PART VI

“WE DON’T CARE WHAT SCHOOLS ARE CALLED — PUBLIC, PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, CHARTER — OR HOW THEY ARE GOVERNED OR NOT GOVERNED. WE CARE THAT ALL SCHOOLS FOLLOW THE SAME RULES, AND ALL STUDENTS FOLLOW THE SAME RULES . . .”

TAKING A STAND

MARCH 1992

In the wake of disappointments over the performance by USA teams in recent Olympic Games, Federal legislation was developed in 1978 to make the United States Olympic Committee the “super sports authority” over all of amateur athletics in the United States. Each sport’s national governing body (NGB) was to be given control of the sport on all levels, from the most elite athletes to the lowest levels of youth competition in that sport.

The school-college community objected to this “vertical” structure which was patterned after the sports organization of other countries, especially the emerging athletic powers of eastern Europe, countries we subsequently have learned fueled their successes with huge doses of illegal and dangerous performance enhancing drugs. The school-college community insisted that it was inappropriate to impose an ends-justify-the-means, “sports first” philosophy on educational athletics where each sport is only a small part of a multi-sports program, and sports in general is only one component of the school and college experience. It was pointed out that the school-college athletic system was almost unique to the United

States, and that an eastern European approach could not be superimposed in the U.S. without doing great harm to great programs and the institutions which sponsored them.

“This is an educational issue. It’s about school improvement. It’s about time on task in our classrooms. About the tail not wagging the dog. About athletics as a means, not an end.”

The leadership of the National Federation of State High School Associations and the National Collegiate Athletic Association, whose memberships owned most of the competitive athletic facilities in the U.S. and involved huge num-

bers of athletes in a variety of sports that were historically important to U.S. citizens, successfully chilled the gold medal fever that was rushing through the USOC, most NGB’s and some federal legislators. The proposed legislation then was modified so that the authority of NGB’s would not supersede and thus interfere with the policies, procedures, programs, or personnel of multi-sports organizations such as the NCAA and state high school associations.

That victory at the national level on behalf of the autonomy of schools and colleges to have different philosophies of athletics than winning gold medals — and to develop policies, procedures and programs consistent with those philosophies — seems now to be hollow because the principles

the National Federation and NCAA defended have eroded at the state and local levels. The NGB's, defeated in their attack from the top down, retreated and then rallied from the bottom up, using young children in programs coached by their parents.

One classic example is soccer. What the federal legislature could not do for the elite soccer from the top down in the 1970's is now being done subtly by kids and their parents from the bottom up. They are bringing into schools the philosophies of year-around, single-sport competition that schools have opposed throughout history and the National Federation and NCAA fought off in the late 1970's. My own two soccer-playing sons and I, the only parent who would coach, were like pawns in a kind of guerrilla war; we were unwitting revolutionaries.

At a January meeting of the National Federation of State High School Associations, one state director predicted that within a decade the national sports governing bodies would be responsible for running high school athletics in that state. But if that should happen, it will not be by the design of the leadership of high school athletics, but by our default from leadership. A leadership deficit.

Some will argue that we shouldn't protest, that if students and parents want year-around programs without encumbrance by school or state high school association rules, that should be their choice. But then the inevitable happens: students miss long periods of school to participate in non-school athletic tryouts and competition, or a student misses a short

field goal and an extra point in a Football Playoff game at the end of a week he spent at a national soccer camp. Inevitably, school administrators will ask for rules to curtail loss of school time, and coaches will ask for rules to combat loss of critical games.

Schools should take a stand before events prove the point any clearer. It is time to take the same kind of stand at the local level that our national leadership took 14 years ago. That leadership resisted invasion from the top down; today's leadership at the local level must resist erosion from the grass roots, and do so with the same vision for what will go wrong and same vigor to assure it does not.

This isn't a power struggle or turf battle in youth sports. It's not school athletic programs vs. non-school athletic programs.

This is an educational issue. It's about school improvement. It's about time on task in our classrooms. About the tail not wagging the dog. About athletics as a means, not an end.

It's about the purpose of schools and the emergency need this nation has for better schools, which will not occur if athletic programs, school sponsored or other, are allowed to run roughshod over the educational program of schools.

It is wrong to argue that the prospects of a college scholarship is justification enough to have one's high school scholarship suffer during the pursuit. Scholarship in high school, not athletic scholarships to college, is the mission of schools and school athletics.

It is wrong to suggest that the lessons learned at non-school national

tryouts and tournaments are satisfactory substitutes for the lessons of the English, math and science classrooms of our schools. Qualifying for a non-school team or tour does not make one qualified to hold a job in the increasingly technical working world.

It is wrong to believe that the skills to dribble, pass, shoot, and score will be sufficient skills for higher education or employment. It is wrong to believe that competition in sports is all sufficient to be competitive in life after sports.

If some sports refuse to respect the educational ethic and framework of schools and begin to infuse interscholastic athletics with philosophies

and practices that are incompatible with education, then we should not hesitate to withdraw our sponsorship of those sports, locally or statewide. Schools are not required to conduct any particular sports program — not soccer, skiing, ice hockey, gymnastics, volleyball, even basketball, any sport — if that sport and its devotees will not conform to schools' goals and objectives.

It is students' and parents' choice to choose a non-school athletic experience, but it is not their choice to change school athletics and the mission of schools. It is the professional responsibility of school leadership to see that they do not. ■

APPEAL FOR FAIRNESS

MAY 1995

I can't get my sons out of my mind as we prepare arguments for the US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in our effort to reverse three lower courts which have allowed two over-age students and two students in their tenth semesters of high school to participate in competitive interscholastic athletics.

Three federal district courts in Michigan have made exceptions to age and semesters limitations for high school athletes because the plaintiffs may have had disabilities that affected their academic progress.

My son Luke has a personal stake in the outcome. Plagued with a heart defect at birth and failure to thrive in his first year of life, Luke was only a 95-pound, 15 year-old sophomore. But he battled his way on to high school teams in two sports, earning a varsity letter in one.

It is not fair for courts to mandate that students who are a year older than my son John, who's a freshman in college, must be allowed to compete in sports against Luke, who's just a sophomore in high school.

It was never fair when John picked

on Luke in our house; and it's not fair for students older than John to compete against Luke in high school sports.

What reasonable person could ever argue that it's fair for college sophomores to compete against high school sophomores? But that's the effect of the district court's decision.

Currently, the MHSAA is appealing to keep 20 year-olds and fifth-year seniors from invading the interscholastic athletic program under judicial interpretation of federal legislation. These maverick court decisions are at odds not only with judicial precedent, but also with common sense. These courts offer no point — not 21 years old, 22, 23 . . . , not sixth year, seventh, eighth . . . — when their elastic interpretation of the federal law snaps.

When do we terminate high school athletic eligibility?

Schools thought they knew the answer and developed through this association rules which provide limits with some leniency. For example, the age limitation has a year of grace: any student can start elementary school a year late, or start on time and be

delayed a year along the way, and still be eligible as a twelfth grader under the age eligibility requirement. There's also a provision that allows students who are delayed more than one year and who would be ineligible as twelfth graders to start their four

years of high school participation while in junior high school, participating with their appropriate age group on high school teams.

Fairness, accomplished through the even-handed application of essential eligibility require-

ments and uniform competition limitations, is our product. If schools can't agree to enforce such standards as to one group of students, then our products can't be produced. When one group of students is exempt from the minimum and maximum requirements that apply to all other students, the playing field tilts toward the exempted group and fairness cannot be advertised or promoted.

Not for Luke. Not for thousands of students battling within the essential eligibility requirements for spots on a team, time in a game or places on an awards stand.■

“When one group of students is exempt from the minimum and maximum requirements that apply to all other students, the playing field tilts toward the exempted group and fairness cannot be advertised or promoted.”

FOR THE FUN OF IT

NOVEMBER 1995

Recently I sat in the crowd to watch a high school football game — and a lot more. It was a beautiful night. Tickets were just \$4.00. The football game had everything — on-side kicks, two-point conversions, and an offensive guard/defensive tackle returning a punt nearly 50 yards for the winning touchdown. There was everything, that is, but taunting, trash talking, and self-aggrandizing displays by players.

More than 60 students ran in a boys and girls cross country meet at half-time. There were several squads of cheerleaders and a marching band performance.

I sat in the stands and visited with people I hadn't seen in months. Many of the adults in attendance did not have children involved in any way: not on the football team, not on the cross country teams, not cheerleading, not in the marching band. They were just enjoying the pure, simple, wholesome and inexpensive fun of high school activities.

I see it as the function of the Michigan High School Athletic Association to preserve this experience, which is an American tradition unlike anywhere else in the world.

I see it as the function of the MHSAA to protect high school ath-

letics from those who would overemphasize or over-commercialize school sports. The MHSAA has been and will continue to be a leading opponent of national high school championships and national televised games of the week.

I see it as the function of the MHSAA to protect high school athletics from those who would lower the standards of sportsmanship. The

MHSAA implemented in 1994-95 tough definitions and penalties for taunting, trash talking and other kinds of disrespectful behavior, standards which have subsequently been incorporated into the national playing rules for high school sports, which in turn may have influenced changes in college rules this season.

I see it as a function of the MHSAA to protect high school athletics from those who would eliminate essential eligibility regulations that promote competitive equity. The MHSAA is vigorously fighting external challenges to give special exceptions to certain students or certain schools, and the MHSAA is working to maintain uniform rules that apply to all students in all schools.

Sports is an extracurricular program of schools unlike non-athletic

“Rules exist, not for their own sake, but because schools have seen problems needing to be addressed, and excesses needing to be eliminated. Rules exist to promote competitive equity.”

extracurricular programs or classroom subjects. Sports draw crowds and media coverage. Sports invite excess and abuse. Because competition is involved, people will always look for competitive advantage; and a fair and level playing field requires regulations, requires a uniform code of rules so that some teams don't start practice too early, play too many games, travel too far, "red-shirt", or load up on transfer students, thus forcing other schools to do the same to keep up.

Rules exist, not for their own sake, but because schools have seen problems needing to be addressed, and excesses needing to be eliminated. Rules exist to promote competitive equity.

The MHSAA will do its best to assure that the trend toward competition between schools as a means to educational reform does not wreck the work done to assure that competition between schools in athletics is

fair. It would be a grave error if school sports are damaged in the politics of school reform.

At the center of what holds many communities together and gives them identity and strength are the public schools. Put them out of business, and entire towns may collapse. Build up schools, and surrounding communities grow stronger. Dismantle or damage schools, and contribute to the speed or degree of the further disintegration of our society.

We don't care what schools are called — public, private, parochial, charter — or how they are governed or not governed. We care that all schools follow the same rules, and all students follow the same rules; so our product — that pure, simple, wholesome, inexpensive fun we witness at venues all across our state — will still be available to the children of my children, 20-some years from now. ■

CATCHING THE RIGHT FISH

AUGUST 1996

Transfer (and residency) regulations are imperfect tools for controlling the athletic eligibility of students who change schools. Even with "undue influence" prohibitions (which are the most difficult violations to prove), the broad net of current regulations entraps some fish it should not, while allowing some fish it should catch to slip through. Sometimes,

totally innocent kids are made ineligible. Sometimes, kids who are moving for athletic reasons — but whose families have the knowledge and money to get around the rules, and plan accordingly — are immediately eligible.

I sleep very well at night with the stated exceptions to the transfer regulation, including one of the newest, adopted by the Representative Coun-

cil last May. I think it's fine that a previously expelled student is immediately eligible upon his (or her) return to a school if that student has performed the criteria that school applied to the student as it expelled him and required of him before allowing his return. This student did not participate in sports elsewhere. Neither the student nor the school gains any competitive athletic advantage, and the process is good for the student.

This change eliminates the situation where expelled students who stayed out of school altogether would be immediately eligible upon returning to that school, while an expelled student who enrolled at another school during his suspension in order to continue structure and education would not be eligible upon return to the expelling school until one semester after the student who did nothing during expulsion.

I sleep very well with other regulations which attempt to keep academics more important than athletics, including the "continuing eligibility" provision we now have that allows students to leave one school to obtain education in a specialized school and to continue to participate on the athletic teams of the first school in sports not sponsored by the specialized school. If the school sponsoring the sport agrees that it is so, this can be

good educationally for the student, and it's okay athletically.

The long-term consequences are positive for the few students it affects, and it won't ruin school sports for the rest of the students.

What bothers me a lot is the student (family) who puts sports above academics. Who sacrifices academic needs for athletic dreams. Who transfers more for athletic reasons than any other, perhaps exclusively for athletic reasons. Whose family will attempt to set up dual residency. Who will sell a house in one district and rent an apartment in a new district. Whose parents will uproot family, even divorce. Who put sports above all else. Who are misguided that sports are more important than anything else or are some kind of key to future success and happiness.

This is the stuff we must stop in order to preserve the integrity of school sports. These are the attitudes and actions that do lead to competitive advantage for few and ruin sports for the rest. The net must catch more of these fish.

As the choices for school attendance broaden for students (and families), the need for regulations that are more to the point in their purpose, more specific in their language, and more powerful in their penalties becomes more important.■

SUPPORTING THE EDUCATIONAL MISSION OF SCHOOLS

FEBRUARY 1999

I.

The most basic policy of school sports — the premise and the first rule — is that persons must be students of the schools they represent in competition.

Some people who do not choose public schools for their children's classroom education but would allow their children to associate with those schools for the sports teams their preferred program of education either cannot or will not provide, object to the foundational principle of our programs.

Most often they use the argument that they pay taxes, believing doing so purchases their son or daughter the right to engage in an activity for which they are not enrolled. Of course, aside for the hypocrisy of their position, they ignore that no such right has been established by Michigan or federal legislatures or judiciaries.

Even students who are enrolled in a school don't have the right to participate in voluntary, extracurricular interscholastic athletics; so obviously, students who are not enrolled in that school don't have the right.

Allowing unenrolled students to participate in interscholastic sports would transform the program from school sports to community sports. And so transformed, there would be little justification for schools to devote precious limited time and

resources to sports. And schools would lose a valuable tool for engaging students, their parents and the community at large in school life.

II.

There is nothing wrong with missing classes for other school activities, unless it happens too frequently.

Some of what I remember best about high school are those occasions when school activities took me out of the classroom. Some of what worried me most about my sons' high school experiences is when they were out of the classroom too much and struggled to meet the academic challenges of their instructors.

Conflict with classroom time is not just an athletic topic. Studies with which I am familiar — Kansas does the best job of measuring loss of classroom instructional time — indicate that there are non-athletic activities that most frequently keep kids out of class, and that most athletic activities in most schools require no classes to be missed.

My experience and that of my sons would agree. For us, it was vocal music that caused us to miss class most often. For us, sports rarely took us out of class.

For us, the time out of class wasn't wasted. It was very valuable in building friendships with classmates, poise and pride in our school as we per-

formed around the town and the state.

The same is just as true for the athletic events that take students out of school during the classroom hours. But I want to urge that we try to minimize such conflicts.

A sports program that supports the academic mission of schools makes classroom conflicts rare exceptions (infrequent and special), not routine interruptions (more a burden than a blessing).

A special eye needs to be kept on spring and fall sports that require daylight, and thus tempt schools to begin events before the classroom day has ended. If schools limit the length of travel and number of competing teams for weekday events, classroom conflicts can be minimized.

One of the reasons MHSAA member schools have agreed to a 600-mile round-trip travel limitation on interstate competition except with schools from border states is to avoid the temptation of the most successful and highest profile teams to participate in national scope tournaments, which cause an inordinate amount of resources to be spent on a few athletes who are then required to miss an inordinate amount of school.

A watchful eye needs to be trained on MHSAA postseason tournament plans. While some conflicts with schools are unavoidable, sometimes teams depart many hours or even a previous day before it is necessary and cause classroom conflicts and travel expenses the tournament planners had intended should be avoided.

III.

There are few issues that create

more controversy within a school district than when the idea is floated to establish a minimum grade-point average for athletic eligibility.

Some people passionately and persuasively argue that it is necessary for accomplishing the purpose of educational athletics that students achieve average or better than average classroom performance to gain the privilege of participation in school sponsored sports.

Others argue with equal zeal and wisdom that these high standards discriminate against those who may need the program most and who, in earning C or D grades, may have given superior academic effort than students who obtained A grades with little or no effort.

Results of the 1998 MHSAA Update Meeting survey found 64.4 percent of respondents favored elevating the MHSAA minimum academic standard for athletic eligibility, compared to the 1990 survey when 72.7 percent of respondents indicated they favored no change. This shift, while unsettling to some, is comforting to me even though I personally oppose a minimum GPA for athletic eligibility.

That school districts passionately debate this topic also is a comfort, for it is proof of the foundation and continuing mission of interscholastic athletics: school sports exist to help schools reach, motivate and educate students.

The difference between school sports and sports programs for the same age group sponsored by non-school organizations is that we raise such issues and have this debate.■

PART VII

**“ . . . IF WE ARE LOSING CONTROL OF THE DESTINY OF
INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS, IT’S BECAUSE WE’VE LOST OUR
MEMORY OR LOST OUR RESOLVE.”**

SELLING OR SELLING OUT?

APRIL 1989

Some of Michigan's most veteran athletic administrators may remember the effort of the 1960's by the school/college community to establish federal prohibitions to the airing of professional football games by any television station that served an area where a high school or college football game would be played. It would detract from the gate and hurt the entire interscholastic and intercollegiate athletic programs supported by those gate receipts, it was argued. And that argument prevailed. Pro football cannot be televised from the second weekend in September through the second weekend of December where high school and college football games will be played.

In the 1970's, the National Federation of State High School Associations made the same arguments in the unsuccessful attempt to prohibit Major League Baseball from televising League Playoff and World Series games on Friday nights. Unlike the effort of the 1960's, this time the school community lobbied without the clout of the National Collegiate Athletic Association. In fact, behind the scenes, the NCAA was offering to compensate the National Federation with a seven-figure amount if the NCAA — which was not under the same ban as the pros — began Friday night telecasts of college football. On principle, the National Federation quietly declined the deal.

Where that principle is today is a genuine question. For recently, the same National Federation which fought pro football and then pro baseball and said, "No thank you" to college football, signed a six-figure contract with a cable television network to televise 25 high school athletic contests a year, starting with Friday night telecasts of football. Creating, in other words, what the National Federation fought for two decades to prohibit: television conflicts with local high school football gate receipts.

The Representative Council of the Michigan High School Athletic Association, caught as much by surprise at this announcement as the MHSAA staff, does not support this action by the National Federation which, ironically, the MHSAA formed with three other state associations in 1921. The Council will consider its response at its meeting this May.

We don't like it when schools blame the MHSAA for decisions or actions and forget that schools themselves are the MHSAA. So it's not appropriate for us to blame the National Federation for this recent decision and action without acknowledging that we — the MHSAA — are the National Federation and accepting responsibility for what has occurred. A national television package of high school events became a possibility when we went silent, and the silence

could be misconstrued to mean we agreed or didn't care.

The television package in and of itself is only a mild irritant. Who in Michigan will stay home from the Cheboygan vs. Gaylord game, for example, to watch Ponca City play Drumright in Oklahoma? However, when the television package is considered with the accumulated effect of other mild irritants which we allowed through our silence, the alarm sounds:

- The elimination of travel distance limits in the National Federation's Athletic Bylaws.
- The proliferation of holiday basketball tournaments involving teams from across the country.
- National ratings; national records.
- National promotions; national student awards.
- Junior high students being recruited by college coaches; high school juniors declaring college intentions; college freshmen determining college fortunes.
- The commercialization of state high school association tournaments.

Commercialization is accepted with broad-sweeping pronouncements like "Corporate sponsorship is the wave of the future." We hear that phrase often, but that doesn't make corporate sponsorship either good or inevitable. And the National Federation's announcement gives us reason to pause again and question even the conservative approach to corporate relationships we've taken in Michigan.

Four principles have guided our corporate involvement.

- Independence from corporate support for basic services.
- Promotion of the educational emphasis and amateur ethic of interscholastic athletics through the corporate relationship.
- Corporate relationships that benefit local schools as much as the state organization.
- Preservation of the MHSAA's identity as the sponsor of MHSAA tournaments.

To the extent that the MHSAA is involved in corporate partnerships to date, it has been faithful to those guiding principles. However, hearing the recent announcement by the National Federation, and taking a step back to look at what has happened to intercollegiate athletics over the past two decades, the concern becomes legitimate that today's innocent paces may become tomorrow's insidious problems, those caused when decisions are based on business, rather than education.

The feature story on the CBS Evening News on March 23, 1989 was entitled, *"The Selling of High School Basketball."* It described the growing commercialism of high school sports and the national television package that had just been signed by the National Federation. But I worried that in a few years we might dust off that newsreel and retitile it: *"The Selling Out of High School Athletics."* Only time will tell.

Only time will tell what the result of all this will bring, and what role Michigan educators have played in protecting what is worth preserving in interscholastic athletics and promoting what is worth changing.

THE DELICATE BALANCE

NOVEMBER 1989

Boiled down as far as possible, the roles of a state high school athletic association are two. One role is to protect interscholastic athletics so that they are educational in both their means and ends; and this is accomplished primarily through the promulgation of regulations to mediate athlete eligibility and the competition between schools. The other role is to promote interscholastic athletics and their value to individual students, schools and communities; and the most visible means for accomplishing this task are the district, regional and state tournaments sponsored by the MHSAA.

One of the most difficult challenges for the elected representatives, committee members and staff of the MHSAA is to find the delicate balance of these two roles because there is an inherent tension — a kind of inevitable friction — that exists between these most basic functions of the state high school athletic association.

Every time a new or tightened regulation is promulgated, there are complaints of too much control and too conservative thought. Whenever a new tournament enhancement or promotion is announced, there are complaints that the additional exposure to the interscholastic program will bring additional pressures on coaches and athletes to perform and to win, and there are worries that we will be following our intercollegiate colleagues down the road of enter-

tainment, rather than education.

When the National Federation of State High School Associations announced its national television package, it defended its action by demonstrating that there would be unprecedented opportunities to promote interscholastic athletics and their value on the national airwaves. Obviously, this is so.

But almost as obviously, there is a price to be paid as increased exposure is brought to our very best teams, and schools become tempted to compromise themselves and the educational objective of the program as they strive to become a participant in one of those televised contests. The price will be blatantly obvious when a network and corporate sponsor take the next step of promoting and televising a national invitational basketball tournament for high schools.

Increased exposure of a positive message versus increased pressure on the participants in the interscholastic program. Is the promotion worth the price?

In the case of the national television package, we don't think so. But it is more important that we keep asking those questions within the state of Michigan as we design programs and make decisions for the schools of this state. The interscholastic program of this state needs protection, but not over-control. The interscholastic program in this state needs promotion, but within an educational philosophy

and framework.

We will depend on the educators of this state to find the proper balance between protection and promotion in

the years ahead, which are years certain to bring us many more pressures to professionalize the pristine world of high school athletics.■

ROOTS

MARCH 1991

A year ago I finished the task of reading every *Bulletin* published in the MHSAA's 67-year history. It wasn't a word-by-word reading of every page, but it was a page-by-page review of every issue.

This was humbling work, bringing home the truth that there are very few new problems, revolutionary solutions or original ideas in interscholastic athletics. It impressed upon me the need for looking back at our accomplished history as much as ahead to our uncertain future.

My counterpart in New Mexico, Dan Salzwedel, stated in a December presentation at the National Conference of High School Directors of Athletics, "We don't understand our roots in interscholastic athletics. At times we forget our purposes, and therein lies our problems."

Mr. Salzwedel recalled that in the early 1900's in New Mexico and most other states, interscholastic athletic programs boldly proclaimed it was their purpose to teach morals and values which would help students be successful in life. He said New Mexico listed teamwork, dedication, disci-

pline, and the work ethic as objectives of the program. He suggested that abandonment of these clearly stated purposes has led to a loss of integrity in interscholastic athletics.

At the same meeting where Mr. Salzwedel spoke, Ron Stolski an athletic director from Brainerd, Minnesota, asked the question "Do you remember why you decided to devote yourself to education and athletics? You probably did it for idealistic reasons . . . to make a difference. Sadly," he said, "there has been a loss of idealism, which is why ethics and integrity are declining in interscholastic athletics."

Al Burr, high school principal in Clayton, Missouri, said this to the MSHAA's Annual Business Meeting audience in 1988: "Why did you become a teacher? Go all the way back to that day you made the decision. I'll just bet that 99.44% of you decided to be teachers because you liked kids, because you wanted to work with kids, because you felt you had something significant to offer kids, and because you wanted to help kids grow just a little bit better. In my opinion," said Dr. Burr, "outstanding principals

don't lose sight of that. They don't stray far from that mission, to help kids grow just a little bit better."

For lots of reasons, the teaching of values has lost favor in at least the public schools of this nation. But if we remember why we began in education, remember our personal roots in education if you will, we would be teaching values, at least in interscholastic athletics.

"When you hire your coaches," said Dr. Burr at the MHSAA Annual Business Meeting, "hire good teachers because they teach the school's most difficult subject — values. Teaching values is not easy. It's much easier to teach facts and skills.

"Compare the difference in difficulty of teaching the value, $9 \times 6 = 54$, with the difficulty of teaching the value of honesty," said Dr. Burr. "Compare the difference in difficulty of teaching the fact that WWII started for us on December 7, 1941 and ended on September 2, 1945, with the difficulty of teaching courage. Compare the difficulty of teaching any fact with the difficulty of teaching the value of integrity. Coaches have to be outstanding teachers because they teach the hardest things we have to teach."

Just as it helps the individual to remember his or her roots in education and athletics, it helps the organization. Lee Iococca has said about the nation, "If we are losing control of our destiny, it's because we aren't facing up to our nation's heritage." Similarly, if we are losing control of the destiny of interscholastic athletics, it may be because we aren't facing up to the heritage of our programs . . .

because we've forgotten the purposes and objectives of educational athletics and forsaken the rules and regulations that were adopted in early years to promote educational athletics.

Tracing the history of interscholastic athletics through the page-by-page chronicles of the MHSAA *Bulletin*, one observes that in the 1920's through 1940's, high schools recognized problems and developed new rules to address them. In the 1960's through 80's, high schools recognized problems and oftentimes dropped old rules to avoid problems. The result has been the return of many old problems.

We relaxed interstate sanctioning requirements, and national-scope tournaments have returned. Many states relaxed outside competition rules, and now we observe that AAU volleyball and basketball programs decimate high school spring sports seasons. The MHSAA relaxed the requirement for weekly academic checks, and academic improprieties seem to be returning.

Jim Watkins, high school athletic director in Louisville, Kentucky who won the Thomas E. Frederick Award for distinguished service in the field of interscholastic athletics, has written: "We have let the universities and colleges and camp organizers (and now the shoe manufacturers) control our very lives. We pay money to universities for summer camps to allow their coaching staffs to view and recruit our young people at our expense. We have allowed rating services to exploit our young people. In our desire to be noticed, we have let others manipu-

late us and our programs.”

It is very possible that if we are losing control of the destiny of interscholastic athletics, it's because we've lost our memory or lost our resolve . . . because we have forgotten our purposes, or forsaken our roots . . .

because we've lost sight of why we got into education and athletics in the first place — to make a positive difference in the character of kids by unashamedly teaching morals and values — or because we've lost our idealism.■

WEEDING

MAY 1991

Seeing the MHSAA executive director straddling the wall of the planter outside the MHSAA building, weed-puller in one hand and uprooted weed in the other, the associate pastor of the nearby church stopped his van, rolled down the window and shouted out to the director, “Now they've got you doing the yard work too?”

“Yeah,” he said. “and it's good therapy for me and good sermon illustration for you.” They chatted a bit longer and the pastor drove off, leaving the director to complete the task of separating the ground cover and rooting out the weeds from the planter that holds the MHSAA sign.

A couple of times between April and October each year, the MHSAA executive director climbs into the planter to pull weeds for an hour or so. He enjoys it. It is one of the times he can actually observe progress.

It's a symbolic experience: separating the good stuff from the bad, and then removing the bad from the scene. The weeds don't protest much,

and the progress is quick and easy.

Much of the executive director's job outside of the planter is the same in type, but far more difficult to complete. Distinguishing the good guys from the bad is less clear, and uprooting them from the scene is anything but quick and easy. They feign and fight. Sometimes they're defended by superiors or boards who should have done the weeding themselves.

The executive director pauses: “Is this a healthy way to view his job? Is it a healthy way to view high school athletics?”

Possibly not; but it's natural, at least on a hot day in the weeds of a planter . . . an almost pleasant diversion from threats by coaches to fight suspensions, threats by schools to appeal forfeits, threats by non-school promoters to challenge regulations. Weeds of other varieties, much less willing but more important to be pulled.

High school athletic associations were formed by schools to put educational fences around interscholastic

athletic programs; and high school association staff were hired to pull the unethical or exploitive weeds that sprouted in the lush fields of competition. Over the years, state high school associations have developed the dual functions of watering and weeding, of promoting and protecting high school athletics.

Balance is the key. When nature brings little rain, we water. When nature brings much rain, we weed. Some years we water much, others we weed more.

In this season, when promoters of all kinds are pouring promotional waters on our programs, the need is for weeding. And we will respond. ■

A WALK IN THE WOODS

AUGUST 1995

My wife and I were on a long walk through the woods and back roads of west Michigan this summer when she remarked, "We're not lost; but we don't know where we are."

We knew how to get back to our car, but we didn't know the direction we were headed. "We're not lost," I mused; "but we don't know where we are."

That's an apt description for interscholastic athletics. We could back-track on the path to the origins of this journey, so we're really not lost. But I don't know anyone who really knows where we are, which direction we might be headed.

There are few who have viewed interscholastic athletics from more

angles than I; but I'm not any clearer about the future than the newest coach or most casual fan. I've looked at high school sports as a coach, and as the son of a coach. I've been

involved as a player, and as the parent of two players. I'm the son of a state leader and the protégé of a national leader. I've been an administrator at the state and national levels. I've read the old histories and handbooks, and I've talked at length with key leaders of the past. But I don't know where we're headed.

Where does this path lead that relaxes or eliminates out-of-season practice and competition restrictions for athletes and their coaches? From the repeated complaints of coaches

“. . . some of those who are pushing the limits of high school athletics have forgotten where they parked the car. And having forgotten this, they wander in vain through the woods, trying this turn and that.”

and administrators, it's evident that path was a bad choice; but how now to find our way back? We've taken a few steps back, but we know it was downhill to this point and a tough uphill climb back.

Where, if ever, is the end of this path that leads to more and more commercialization of sports? Where are we being taken as high school associations in other states relax or eliminate amateur and awards rules?

Where are the sporting goods manufacturers and street agents taking high school basketball? Will the game that has captured hearts and minds for generations continue its charm when the pervasive corruption of college basketball is exposed or it infects high school heroes beyond healing?

When, if ever, will the government's thirst to regulate sports be quenched? Where, if ever, will the requests end for extra protections and privileges for special groups?

When, if ever, will seasons be long enough, travel far enough and the

stakes high enough to satisfy promoters? Where are we being taken as high school associations in other states take down the barricades placed on those paths by the pioneers of our programs?

Eventually, on our walk through the woods, my wife and I determined it was time to turn around and head back toward our starting point. We didn't think we could go any further ahead and still make our way back. We knew we didn't have the power of mind to remember more turns. We ran out of memory before we ran out of energy.

I worry that some of those who are pushing the limits of high school athletics have forgotten where they parked the car. And having forgotten this, they wander in vain through the woods, trying this turn and that.

They've run out of memory, but not energy; and sadly, they drag us along, deceiving us and perhaps themselves that it's only around the next corner or over the next hill that we will see clearly again or reach our goal. ■

NOT AN INAPPROPRIATE OVERSIGHT

MARCH 1996

We should not get overly worked up that the federal government's "GOALS 2000" for education, which President Clinton promoted again in his January 23 "State of the Union" address, does not make any reference to interscholastic athletics.

This omission simply reinforces that the essence and the strength of interscholastic athletics is not at the federal level, but at the local level.

I'm not bothered that some federal bureaucrats have overlooked the importance of interscholastic athletics

because I know very well from everyday, first-hand experience that interscholastic athletics is very much alive in most of our communities. If anything, there is too much life . . . so much that the athletic program sometimes overshadows all other parts of the educational program combined.

In fact, so frequent are the examples of excess, we have to give as much attention to diminishing the role of athletics as to enhancing its role.

I think of the school superintendent here in Michigan who says the largest controversy in his school district during his two-year tenure is over the way the girls varsity basketball coach kept game statistics. It has divided his school board as no other issue has.

I think of the little parochial school in an Atlantic coast state that cannot afford a fax machine but whose boys basketball team travels to a tournament in a Pacific coast state each year.

I think of several schools in this state and others that had to forfeit football games for the inadvertent use of ineligible players, and the efforts of townspeople to reinstate their teams.

Those efforts have never been matched by those of all other townspeople to support other parts of those school districts' programs.

I think of the school which lost in the first round of the 1995 MHSAA Team District Wrestling Tournament and then joined a parent in a lawsuit against its own association when it was not allowed by long-standing, uniformly applied practice to advance to the Team Regional Tournament.

No, there is plenty of attention given to interscholastic athletics in most Michigan communities and most schools of other states. School sports need no support at the federal level, save for the commitment to get intrusive rules and unfunded mandates out of the lives of school administrators.

The place of interscholastic athletics in schools and in the fabric of society is preserved not by federal pronouncement but by local performance . . . by the efforts of coaches and administrators to provide a program that is educational in both ends and means, maintained in proper perspective within the overall mission and purpose of schools. ■

“The place of interscholastic athletics in schools and in the fabric of society is preserved not by federal pronouncement but by local performance . . .”

INVITATION TO ENLIST

APRIL 1996

My in-laws gave me for Christmas last year a book called *Complete & Utter Failure*. Real confidence booster, isn't it! Guess they're not too happy with the life I've given their daughter.

In the book, author Neil Steinberg writes of the "Clark Syndrome," named after the science fiction writer best known for *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Clark also wrote *Report on Planet Three* in which he "saw a world of limitless growth and potential, where people lived on the moon, and on Mars; where they didn't work because machines did everything; and where the only problem was encouraging everybody to consume hugely and quickly enough so that the products pouring out of automatic factories would not start to pile up and create a clutter."

Steinberg defines the Clark Syndrome as "The belief that because something can be done, it will or should be done." The Clark Syndrome suffers the delusion of "tunnel vision and hydrogen bomb-maker's morality, seizing on anything attractively new and deciding it will rule the future."

I submit that it is this Clark Syndrome that makes some folks believe that nationally standardized eligibility rules, national promotions or national high school championships will solve

our state and local problems. They probably will not solve any problems; but if they solve any at all, they will create a new and bigger replacement set of problems.

No, the hope of interscholastic athletics is in preserving and promoting what

is unique, special and fundamental to our nature: Pure, amateur, educational, multi-sport programs conducted at the local and state levels, generating enthusiasm in and identity for communities, and providing opportunities for students who will never again compete before a crowd, teaching youth lessons of sportsmanship and citizenship with efficiency that classroom education often cannot.

And the most effective way to accomplish this — likely the only way — is by promoting and protecting this fundamental nature and purpose on the local level, community by community. It doesn't take millions of dollars to do this. It takes dedicated coaches and administrators equipped to do this, and committed to doing this every day in countless little ways.

The offensive we need to preserve pure, amateur, educational athletics is not an airwar, not high altitude planes dropping bombs on nameless and faceless townspeople below. No, we need little squadrons of soldiers going vil-

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lage to village, inviting people — neighborhood by neighborhood, civic group by civic group, business by busi-

ness, person by person — to become engaged in the uniquely American tradition of interscholastic athletics.■

WHY I'M A FUDDY-DUDDY

MAY 1999

The more I observe the world of sports, the prouder and more protective I become of school sports.

In school sports, we strive to achieve lengths of seasons and trips, as well as numbers of contests per week and per season, that allow participants to be students first and athletes second (or even third). In contrast, some intercollegiate programs cause teams to play in any state in the nation, on any day of the week, at almost any hour of the day or night.

It should be no surprise that college presidents and conference commissioners are embarrassed with athletes' graduation rates that are not defensible in sports programs sponsored by educational institutions. How can it be right for a majority of Division I men's basketball players to never graduate from college?

Youth leagues in ice hockey, soccer and other sports tempt students to the same scheduling and travel excess-

es, lowering GPAs if not graduation rates of their players.

We prohibit students from participating in high school all-star games and national high school championships, unlike most every other level of sports in America that blindly pursue the “bigger is better” philosophy that takes even pre-teens to national and even international tournaments.

In school sports, we reject alcoholic beverages for our television sponsors, in contrast to some telecasts of athletic events by colleges, where alcohol is the reason for more academic failures and dropouts than any other cause, and binge drinking is epidemic and becoming increasingly deadly to college students. How can it be right to allow alcoholic ads?

For MHSAA events, we also refuse advertising and sponsorship by casinos and even the Michigan Lottery, both of which are making gambling a way

“There are so many excesses and abuses in sports we read about daily, most of which we avoid in school sports by good old-fashioned rules and regulations . . .”

of life in society. Meanwhile, national intercollegiate athletic executives identify sports betting as the greatest threat to the integrity, and thus the popularity, of intercollegiate athletics.

In school sports, we have rules which, in the name of modesty, establish the minimum dimensions of swimming suits, while the governing body of women's beach volleyball has rules which, in the name of exploitation, establishes the maximum for bikini bottoms worn by female players. How can that be right?

In school sports, we limit the value of trophies, medals and merchandise to \$15 per item. We prohibit cash payments. We require high school athletes to be amateurs, unlike what we're seeing in intercollegiate and Olympic athletics.

We refuse to equate victory with monetary gain, which is part of what creates the appetite for performance-

enhancing drugs. The Feb. 15, 1999 cover story of *Newsweek* Magazine stated, "The greatest threat to the image, integrity and even the continued existence of elite level international competitions from the World Cup to the Tour de France to the Olympic games themselves is the use of illicit performance-enhancing drugs."

We reject the "No. 1 syndrome" that equates Olympic silver medals with losing.

There are so many excesses and abuses in sports we read about daily, most of which we avoid in school sports by good old-fashioned rules and regulations, and restraints on egos and profits. The more I see of sports on other levels by other sponsors, the more I respect the heritage of and continuing vision for school sports . . . not perfect, but as pure and wholesome as any sports we can find in America today. ■

PART VIII

“SPORTSMANSHIP HAS THE POTENTIAL OF ELEVATING HUMANITY IN TIMES AND PLACES AND PEOPLES WE DON’T EVEN KNOW, THROUGH THE STUDENTS WE ARE TEACHING AND COACHING TODAY.”

TAKING SPORTSMANSHIP HIGHER AND FARTHER

FEBRUARY 1989

Great things are happening in Michigan. School after school, and entire leagues, are focusing on improved sportsmanship. It isn't a reformation, because things weren't so bad that reform was warranted; but it is a kind of renaissance, a revival in the spirit and activity of schools toward this old but still vital aspect of interscholastic athletics: sportsmanship.

All who are involved in the renaissance deserve praise and appreciation. Those who used the "Good Sports are Winners" sportsmanship kit developed and distributed by the MHSAA with the Michigan PTA and Michigan Association of School Boards, and those who didn't have to use the kit because they have their own program in place, congratulations and thank you!

And now let's go higher and farther.

I remember complaining to my high school algebra teacher in the mid-1960's: "As soon as we learn one thing, you give us something new and harder to learn. It's like a penalty. Why should we work so hard and so fast?"

That teacher, who was also my baseball coach, just smiled and said, "You'd be disappointed in yourself and in me if we both got too satisfied with where we are now."

Yes, we would be disappointed if we didn't go higher and farther with our sportsmanship efforts. So here are five ways we might think of sportsmanship with broader scope and higher standards than we may have

thought about sportsmanship before.

First, good sports — that is, really good sports — remember in all circumstances that the interscholastic athletic program is provided for the education of students more than entertainment of the public.

This view sees high school athletics not just as an end in itself, but also as a means to better performance in other parts of the curriculum. Surveys have indicated that participation in school activities is a better predictor of success in later life than either grade point average or results on standardized tests. Surveys have revealed that participants in interscholastic athletics have higher grade point averages, lower dropout rates, better daily attendance, and fewer discipline problems than do non-participating students. A very recent survey reveals, not surprisingly, that participants in such school programs are happier about school than nonparticipants.

Secondly, good sports — really good sports — remember that the maximum educational potential of the interscholastic athletic program is reached only when all participants taste all experiences. This view sees athletics as a sumptuous, expansive buffet, and not the way Kentucky Fried Chicken views food, seeing only one thing and doing that right.

This view sees as much value in losing as in winning. This view doesn't underestimate the educational value

of losing or overestimate the value of winning. I told the 9-year olds I coached on my son's softball team last summer that they had a perfect record: 4-4. Four times they had to deal with winning and four times they had to deal with losing.

This view keeps competition and its results in proper perspective. If one's participation in athletics is at the expense of another's self-esteem, the program can't be justified in a school setting. But really good sports are as careful to not lavish praise on winners or achievers as to not heap ridicule on losers or those who fail. Generally, in school activities, we do a good job of not heaping too much ridicule on those who stumble or fail. However, we often fall in the trap of lavishing too much praise and recognition on those who win and achieve great things. Good sports keep both criticism and praise in proper balance; they keep competition and the results in proper perspective.

This view of athletics, which sees variety as a prerequisite to realizing the educational potential of the athletic program, loathes specialization — students competing in only one sport during the school year, students practicing in only one sport year-round. This view hates specialization, because single sport athletes almost always reduce their athletic and educational opportunities. Statistically, in more than 99 cases out of 100, specialization hurts student athletes more than it helps them, no matter how gifted in athletics they are. Only a fraction of one percent of high school athletes ever play college

sports, much less get college scholarships, much less receive professional contracts or participate in the Olympic games.

With rare exception, specialization hurts high school athletes no matter how gifted they are, and we educators need to say so. We — who love our activities so much we wish students would specialize in them — we need to say so, because no one will have more influence on these young people than their teachers and coaches. And the more gifted the student is, the greater the lure and trap of specialization, so the more clearly and persuasively we must communicate the danger of specialization.

It is the sportsmanlike thing to do: to develop the person more than the athlete. There is nothing better for the person than variety of experience on the high school level: athletic and non-athletic activity, academic and non-academic activity, to participate as star and scrub, onstage and backstage, in solo and ensemble, winning and losing. Good sports don't force choices on high school students. Good sports facilitate students feeding at the sumptuous and expansive buffet of education and athletics.

Third, really good sports remember that sportsmanship is more than observing a list of don'ts; it's also observing a list of do's.

Not only do good sports refrain from booing opponents or officials, and from chanting "air ball" when a foul is committed, really good sports stop other fans from doing these things. Really good sports treat opponents as special guests, and officials as

respected colleagues, partners in the educational endeavor of interscholastic athletics.

Not only do good sports refuse to do such dances over opposing ball carriers who lay on the ground, really good sports help the ball carriers up from the ground. Not only do good sports resist thrusting their index finger in the air and shouting, "We're number one" or sing "Na na na, hey hey, good-bye" to defeated opponents, really good sports stop other fans from doing these childish, even spiteful things. Good sports focus on the do's of sportsmanship as well as the don'ts.

Fourth, really good sports remember that sportsmanship begins long before the contest begins.

Public address announcements during a contest are important, but they're tardy. Public address announcements before a contest are important, but they are tardy. Public address announcements at school on game day are important, but they too are tardy. Sitting a hot-headed athlete down in the middle of a contest is important, but it's tardy. Ejecting an unruly parent from the premises of an athletic contest is important, but it is tardy.

Good sportsmanship begins long before that. For example, it begins with administrators telling coaches when they are hired what it is they expect from coaches in the way of sportsmanship; and it continues with administrators repeating these in-

structions at the start of every school year, at the start even of every sports season. Good sportsmanship begins with homeroom presentations by top administrators of the school district, and it continues with constant reminders for all students through pub-

lications, posters and assembly programs. Good sportsmanship begins with coaches insisting that athletes practice with good sportsmanship every day, so it becomes a habit to compete with good sports-

manship in every contest.

Good sportsmanship begins with the acknowledgement that educational athletics require an educational environment, nothing less. Good sportsmanship continues with a plan to improve sportsmanship among all players, coaches and spectators: if we fail to plan, we can plan to fail. And good sportsmanship succeeds when there is constant vigilance; if we let up, things blow up.

Fifth, really good sports remember that not only does good sportsmanship begin long before the contest begins, good sportsmanship lasts long after the contest is over. I saw this impact most clearly in a junior varsity football game I was helping to coach many years ago. We trailed 7-6 late in the game and had the ball on our own 30 or 35 yard line. There was time for only a desperation play or two.

We called time-out and instructed our split end to run down the field eight or ten yards and break toward

“. . . really good sports remember that not only does good sportsmanship begin long before the contest begins, good sportsmanship lasts long after the contest is over.”

the sidelines hoping the defensive back would come up to cover that pattern, and then break down the field. The quarterback took the snap from center, dropped back to pass, and threw a perfect spiral to the split end just as he was making his second break. The split end took the ball into his hands, tucked it under his arm, and ran down the field untouched into the end zone. The score changed to 12-7 our favor, with only a few seconds remaining to play.

But what only a few people had seen, and no official had seen, was that the split end had stepped out of bounds as he was making his second cut, and he was not eligible to catch the pass. Our head coach saw it, some of our players saw it, but no official saw that our split end had stepped out of bounds. You can't imagine the agony that our head coach went through.

He looked at the scoreboard that read 12-7 our favor, and down to the sideline where the boy had stepped out of bounds. He looked to the teams lining up for the extra point, and back down to the sideline where the boy had stepped out of bounds. He looked into the eyes of the players beside him who had seen the boy step out of bounds. And then we waved his arms, ran out onto the field and got an official's attention. The official came over and listened, turned around and waved his arms, and cancelled the touchdown. We lost the game, 7-6.

The coach took some heat for his action; but in the locker room after the game, he told all of the players that the business of learning is more

important than the business of winning in high school athletics. "Today," he said, "we learned that honesty's not a sometime thing, it's an all-the-time thing. We play by the rules all the time, not just when we get caught."

That was good sportsmanship at its best, and it had an impact that has lasted a lifetime.

Some years ago when I coached football, our school district had two policies that raised sportsmanship to levels I had never thought of before. The first required that every football player must play in a game every week on some level: freshman, junior varsity or varsity. The second policy required that every member of the football team start a game at least once during the season on some level. One time, every athlete had to have the opportunity of pregame jitters and butterflies, knowing that he would be in the contest at the start of the game, not when the score was 20-0 or 0-20.

It was late in the season when we realized that one of our players, Tommy, hadn't yet started a game. Tommy was oversized and undercoordinated, and really a very poor football player, we thought. But we had to start him — that was the school policy. So he was told he would start, and our strategy was to let him play a few downs at defensive tackle until the other team realized his weaknesses, and then we would get him out of the game quickly. But for some reason, perhaps the thrill of starting a contest elevated his performance, Tommy did just fine at defensive tackle, and we

left him there the whole game. If he had weaknesses, the other team didn't exploit them.

At the end of the game as Tommy was leaving the field with his sweaty face and dirty uniform, he gave me a hug and a hoot as he ran toward the locker room in the high school. He was a part of things for really the first time that year.

As I walked from the field to the high school, I was intercepted by a man and his wife, Tommy's father and mother. His father didn't say anything but "Thank you" and stuck out his hand to shake mine. Tommy's mother didn't say anything at all, but I could see her face over her husband's shoulder, and she had tears in her eyes, which said it all. They were so grateful that Tommy had been allowed to have a meaningful part in our program! And those parents went from being problem-makers to being problem-solvers in our school district.

The more students we involve in our programs and involve meaningfully — as good sports should — the more parents we will have who support our programs today and the more people we will have to support our programs in the future. They are the future "Yes" votes for our millages.

School finance is a big issue in Michigan, and school finance does need overhauling to be fairer from district to district. But if we would involve all students in our school activities, and involve them meaningfully, we would pass every millage that came along, and no school would ever be in a funding crisis.

Good sports remember good

sportsmanship has that kind of long-term impact, and really good sports dedicate themselves to making that kind of impact.

In a book entitled *Discovery of Morals*, which is not about athletics at all, the author, who is not an athlete, writes: "Sportsmanship is probably the clearest and most popular expression of morals . . . Sportsmanship is a thing of the spirit; it is timeless and endless, and we should strive to make it universal to all races, creeds and walks in life."

Sportsmanship . . . an expression of morals . . . a thing of the spirit. Sportsmanship reveals the morals of a team, a school, and a community. Sportsmanship reveals the spirit of a team, a school, and a community.

Sportsmanship has the potential of elevating humanity in times and places and peoples we don't even know through the students we are teaching and coaching today. As we affect them for good sportsmanship, they have the potential of carrying good sportsmanship to all races, creeds and walks in life — far distant from the high school athletic arena.

Good sportsmanship is not merely a campaign; it is the essence of what we are about in interscholastic athletics. Good sportsmanship should be in our thoughts in every practice and every game, and in every situation that has anything to do with our programs.

It is our challenge to create this far-reaching understanding of sportsmanship in our schools and communities and to raise even higher the standards of sportsmanship of the people we serve. ■

THE SPORTSMANSHIP CHALLENGE

AUGUST 1998

(Conclusion to a presentation by the author to the Associated Press, June 4, 1998)

There is little question but that the high school athlete is the best behaved athlete on any level in Michigan; and at high school athletic events, the best behaved people are the athletes. Athletes would be disqualified from this day of competition and the next if they did once what fans do routinely.

The problem is in the stands with the people who are beyond game rules and beyond school administrators' authority and who have forgotten or have never known the purpose of educational athletics, and sometimes get so blind with partisanship that they write, e-mail and call with outlandish complaints about everything imaginable.

The problem is made worse by media. For example, this April 2, 1998 lead by the *Associated Press*: "DETROIT — After a slow start, Wednesday night's game turned into everything Detroit fans were hoping for: mass mayhem and another bloody Red Wings victory over the hated Colorado Avalanche."

Or a columnist's lead a month later when the St. Louis Blues came to Detroit: "DETROIT — Villains, we're looking for villains. Rivalry,

we're looking for rivalry. Hate, we're looking for hate (just a little bit of hate)."

Media like to pontificate that they know what's good for sports. Well those paragraphs are not good for sports, on any level.

Media like to defend such coverage by saying it's what the public wants to see and wants to read. Well if that's the defense, then the media bet-

ter stop claiming it has independence and integrity. Independence and integrity would say — principle would dictate — we don't write this junk, even if the public wants it. It's gutless and it's harmful; and your challenge is to reject such writing.

My challenge is to get school administrators and board of education members to believe they can change behavior in spite of such reporting.

Some school people feel the sportsmanSHIP problem is too large to solve. They say we're up against televised examples of poor sports in college and professional games, declining standards of all kinds in schools, and diminishing support at home. "Society is unraveling," they say, "How can we stop it in sports?"

I ask these folks to think for a minute about positive changed behaviors in society over the last 10-20 years.

"School sports have no future in this or any other state — communities can run the programs, but schools won't need to bother — if we don't have sportsmanship . . ."

Against huge obstacles, Americans have learned to conserve energy and to recycle cans, bottles, plastic and paper. We have smoke-free restaurants, offices, airports and malls; we have fat-free and salt-free foods; we have sugar-free and caffeine-free drinks.

We can have “boo-free” arenas and violence-free contests. We can recycle bad energy to good. We can have both the absence of bad behavior and presence of good behavior. That is what will set high school sports apart and make us attractive in the 21st century. It is our niche in the sports world.

And that is the purpose of our ads, awards, articles, PSA’s, annual sportsmanship kit, first Statewide Sports-

manship Summit last September and second Statewide Summit this September: to make schools responsible and active at the local level, to not only arrest the declining standards of sportsmanship, but to elevate awareness and behavior.

School sports have no future in this or any other state — communities can run the programs, but schools won’t need to bother — if we don’t have sportsmanship (that’s our product, not championships), if we don’t have opportunity (for many, not just a few), and if we don’t have positive, educational experiences for participants and spectators alike.

That’s the state of high school sports the MHSAA is working for.■

PART IX

“IF WE LOWER THE STANDARDS , IF WE REDUCE THE REQUIREMENTS, IF WE TRANSFER RESPONSIBILITY TO NON-SCHOOL GROUPS, SPORTS WILL BE MUCH LESS CAPABLE OF DOING GOOD THINGS FOR KIDS AND THEY WILL HAVE NO POTENTIAL OF DOING GOOD THINGS FOR SCHOOLS.”

TOUGH TIMES ARE THE BEST TIMES FOR DEFINING PROGRAMS

OCTOBER 1991

(On July 30, 1991, USA Today printed an abbreviated version of an article it had solicited from the author. The complete article is printed here.)

The Chinese symbol for "problem" if translated literally means "opportunity riding a dangerous wind," which is the way to view the so-called "crisis" in funding interscholastic athletics.

Some people will miss the opportunity; or they will seed the gathering storm clouds. They will curtail junior high and junior varsity programs and impose participation fees; or they will make bad times worse by resorting to national rankings, travel and TV, corporate sponsors and outside boosters.

Those who believe the way out of the funding crisis is to eliminate programs miss the lessons of economics. Strong schools stimulate local economies. Cutting programs exacerbates a downward spiral for schools, businesses and home owners. Communities feel the negative effects of program cuts and participation fees for many years after programs are restored and fees eliminated.

Those who believe that the way out of the funding crisis is to promote the interscholastic program as entertainment miss the lessons of history. Only a handful of major college athletic programs have avoided budget deficits despite years of aggressive marketing campaigns. Even resorting to lucrative

alcoholic beverage sponsors has not saved its purse, while costing intercollegiate athletics its soul. Non-revenue programs are being cut; revenue-producing programs are being corrupted.

Lawrence University's Henry Merritt Riston wrote a critique of intercollegiate football that is as appropriate today as when he wrote it in 1937: "The institution which exploits youth for profit or publicity betrays its calling; it impairs or destroys its capacity to fulfill its true function."

Management consultant Susan Gross provides this warning in "The Ten Most Common Organizational Problems" published in *Foundation News*: "Nothing leads faster to a loss of identity and direction than a program that has become shaped more by funding opportunities than by real needs and issues."

Today's tough times in funding interscholastic athletics challenge us to avoid exploiting students to pay our bills or providing only those opportunities for which funding is available. We must provide what students need, not just what is easy to pay for. The funding crisis challenges us to fulfill our true function, to do what is historically and educationally correct, not expedient.

Now is the time to remember or reclaim that education, not entertainment, is the purpose of secondary school athletics. The interscholastic program pro-

vides laboratory courses in physical and emotional development. It teaches lessons that are absent in or slower to come from classroom education.

In addition, the interscholastic program provides a means to better performance in classroom curriculum. Participants in interscholastics have higher grade point averages, lower dropout rates, better daily attendance, and fewer discipline problems than do non-participating students. Students have high grade point averages and lower rates of tobacco and alcohol use in their seasons of participation as opposed to out. And the more activities in which a student participates, the higher the student's grade point average is likely to be.

One of the most celebrated school principals in the nation, Al Burr of Clayton, Missouri, says: "Nowhere do you find it in education like you find it in athletics that teachers are teaching what they want to teach to students who are learning what they want to learn, and both are willing to work hour-after-hour on their own time after school so that everything that can be taught is taught and everything that can be learned is learned."

This is education at its best. If all parts of the curriculum required 90-120 minute classes every day and one or two tests each week, open to the public, as interscholastic athletics demands, no one would wonder if we we had effective schools. It would be obvious to everyone.

Santee Ruffin, formerly with the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Urban Services, stated in a speech in Detroit last November: "School activities represent the salvation

of schools and maybe the nation." He said, "They promote academic achievement, equal access to opportunity regardless of race and class, cultural understanding, and self-esteem by giving youth a place to be loved, cared for and to being, a place where they can make mistakes and still be accepted. This is what our schools need to save them," said Mr. Ruffin; "this is what our nation may need to save it," he added.

The interscholastic program is one of the best bargains in all of education and should be "promoted" only in that context: as an effective and an efficient part of schools' budgets.

Interscholastic athletic programs usually need but 1% or 2% of the total school budget to supplement revenue, and yet the program will involve 25% to 75% of students directly, many other students indirectly, as well as their parents.

Schools need this involvement by students and parents to be successful. The program is an ignitor of school spirit and a glue for communities. It should be embraced enthusiastically in times of budget difficulties, not set adrift to fend for itself in the vicious world of sports hype, where in doing battle with high-profile college and professional programs, the high school athletic program can only be swamped.

Now is not the time to give in to funding problems, but to ride out this storm, giving full status to interscholastics within the school budget. The worst thing to do is to promote the interscholastic program as something greater than classroom education or something to be funded outside the school district approved and taxpayer supported operational budget. ■

WHY SCHOOL SPORTS ARE WORTH SAVING

MARCH 2000

(Excerpts from the author's keynote address January 27, 2000, for the "Crisis in School Sport" colloquium sponsored by the Center for Sport Policy Studies at the University of Toronto.)

My view of what schools are for and what is important in education has been shaped by my experiences as a participant in high school athletics, as a high school teacher and coach, as an administrator of educational athletics at the national and state levels, and as a parent of two students who were involved in school sports.

These experiences convince me that the following two points are valid and valuable:

- (1) For elementary school students, the critical need in their education is reading proficiency. With it, students have the best chance to succeed in school then and later. Teaching reading skills should be our primary educational goal in elementary education, incorporated into all subject areas. Reading teachers, resources and classrooms should be non-expendable, no matter how limited the financial situation.
- (2) For secondary school students, the critical need in their education is for motivation: not so much for

the nuts and bolts of any particular subject, but for the hunger to learn and the motivation to pay the price to succeed. Students who have this motivation succeed then and in later life. Doing all we can to

motivate students to stay in school, to like school and to do well in school should be our primary objective in secondary school education.

And that — motivating kids — is the role of interscholastic athletics, which should be considered just a non-expendable in our secondary schools as reading curriculum is in our elementary schools.

No, running and jumping and kicking and throwing and catching are not as important as reading, writing and arithmetic in secondary schools. However, the motivation these activities generate for students to stay in school and to like school and to do well in school in reading, writing and arithmetic is every bit as important. It is crucial, and non-expendable, no matter how limited we think funds may be.

We don't know if it's cause and effect, but we do know these are statistical links:

- Participants in school activities generally have higher grade point averages, lower dropout rates, better daily attendance and fewer dis-

"If we leave sports to the community, then we lose sports as a tool of education. We lose sports as a way to reach and motivate young people."

cipline problems than do non-participating students.

- Participants in school athletics generally have higher grade point averages and lower rates of tobacco and alcohol use in their seasons of competition than out.
- Students who participate in two sports generally have higher grade point averages than those who participate in one; those who participate in three sports generally have higher grade point averages than those who participate in two.
- Participants in school activities feel better about schools and about education.

In a word, participants in school activities are **motivated** to stay in school, like school and do well in school. The programs that do these things for our students should not be cut; they should not be threatened.

Data just made available recently by a Canadian researcher connects participation in school sports to continued participation in sports in adulthood and higher income.

Here's a sampling of statements based on other studies:

Two researchers at East Carolina University published research in the bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals in May of 1996 and concluded with this statement: "Achieving success in our society requires much more than academic success, so schools must provide for more than just the academic development of adolescents."

Professor Randy Testa at Dartmouth College stated in the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* in March of

1999: "The arts — and I'm considering athletics an art — are the place where people synthesize knowledge in new and interesting ways. The arts explore the ways in which we are not just educated, but ways in which we are human."

Professor Herbert Marsh made the following statement in the *Sociology of Sport Journal* in September of 1993 based on data collected in the 1980's from 10,613 randomly selected high school students: ". . . participation in sports favorably affected . . . social concept, academic self-concept, educational aspirations two years after high school, attending university, educational aspirations in the senior year, being in the academic track, school attendance, taking academic courses, taking science courses, time spent on homework, parental involvement, parental educational aspirations, taking math courses and taking honor courses."

Douglas Heath, an educator from Haverford College, has done some of the best research on this topic and published it in *Fulfilling Lives: Paths to Maturity and Success*. He concludes, "School grades and achievement test scores predict moderately well which students will do well in school the next year, but they do not predict which students of average or above-average grades and test scores will succeed in later life. Extracurricular participation is a school's best predictor of an adult's success."

Taken together, one must conclude that if we care about kids' performance in school and their happiness and performance after gradua-

tion, we will supplement our curriculum with a full program of extracurricular activities, including athletics.

If we decide that high school athletics are expendable and won't be offered, we do at least these two things:

First, we condemn the students to less fulfilling and successful lives than more fortunate students in other places may have.

Second, we condemn the community in which they are educated to becoming less prosperous in the future than it is today. We exacerbate school and community problems. Local real estate suffers; local business declines.

If I were moving to a community and had the opportunity to select one school district with a full program of school sports and another with an incomplete program or no program at all, I would choose what most people would choose, and the other communities would suffer.

Some will argue that sports is a luxury for schools to sponsor. They will say, "Let the communities run the programs. It's too expensive for schools."

If we leave sports to the community, then we lose sports as a tool of education. We lose sports as a way to reach and motivate young people.

There is a difference between school and non-school programs. Throughout history, school sports has distinguished itself in the areas of scholarship, sportsmanship, safety and the scope of our programs. We have

put academics before athletics, we have required high standards of behavior, we have protected the health of participants, and we have set sane limits on the number of games and the length of travel.

Much of the value of school sports results from the standards we have set for school sports. Many of the benefits of school sports result from the requirements we have made.

If we lower the standards, if we reduce the requirements, if we transfer responsibility to non-school groups, sports will be much less capable of doing good things for kids and they will have no potential of doing good things for schools.

In the summer of 1992, Thomas Boswell, the highly respected writer for the *Washington Post*, wrote a nationally syndicated column entitled, "Save Now, Pay Later." He wrote: "Shakespeare is great. But if you want to run a public school that works, there's no better place to spend your money than on a strong athletics program that involves as many students as possible in as many sports as possible."

And let's leave the final word to Canada. Samuel Freedman, former Chief Justice of Manitoba, has stated this: "A commitment toward intellectual excellence is a good thing. But a commitment toward intellectual and physical excellence is even better. It is in the realization of the latter objective that participation in athletics can play such a valuable role." ■

PART X

**“ . . . COACHES ARE MODELS AND MENTORS AS WELL AS THE
DELIVERY SYSTEM OF EDUCATION ATHLETICS . . . ”**

COACHES AND COMMUNICATION

OCTOBER 1988

Last winter the MHSAA staff hosted the presidents of the state's high school coaches associations for dinner and discussion. At the conclusion of the evening, one of the presidents said, "You know, I have more communication with the leadership of the MHSAA than I do with the leadership of my own school."

We accepted the statement as a compliment, but we've thought about it often with concern. If coaches and administrators aren't communicating, how can we make good decisions? And if coaches and administrators aren't communicating, whose fault is it?

During the past spring and summer as we met with coaches for season and out-of-season limitations, we learned that the communication gap is wider than we imaged and that coaches are partly at fault. My purpose in this message is not to point a blaming finger, but to offer coaches suggestions for their part in closing the communication gap.

First, avoid tunnel vision. Every time you have an idea for improving your sport, think of its impact on other sports, non-athletic activities, or academics. Will an improvement in your schedule hurt another activity? Try to balance the good you see with the bad another might see.

Second, avoid negative characterizations of others. If we had a dime for every time we've heard a coach say his or her administrator hates sports, is

out of touch or is lazy, we would have enough to reimburse schools for tournament expenses in another sport.

Before saying a principal hates sports, talk to him or her about the problems sports has sometimes caused the school. Before saying a superintendent is out of touch, acknowledge the legal, fiscal, physical, instructional, and personnel topics he or she must be in touch with daily to allow the school to operate. Before saying an athletic director is lazy, compare calendars and note that every time the season gets longer for one sport, it gets longer for the athletic director, who serves not one but as many as 40 or 50 sports teams during the school year.

Third, work through the system. If coaches are to change policy on the local level, they must work through their superiors. If coaches are to change policy on the state level, they must work through those who represent the school in association matters — primarily their athletic directors and principals. It does no good, and probably a lot of harm, for coaches of any sport to get together to complain and criticize. They need to develop constructive alternatives to policies they oppose and communicate as professionals their positions on matters that affect the sports they love.

Coaches know the importance of communicating with athletes. Sometimes, however, they overlook com-

municating with their administrators who could be just as important in the development of a successful program. Winning coaches communicate on all

levels and take personal responsibility for closing the communication gaps on both their athletic and administrative teams.■

WHAT POTENTIAL

AUGUST 1994

The president of my collegiate alma mater recently wrote of the school's aspiration "to attract students of ability, ambition, idealism and character."

I was struck immediately, and have ruminated on that statement since, that it would be a healthy goal of school athletics to attract coaches of ability, ambition, idealism and character. Just think what this would do for educational athletics.

- It would tend to assure that students were taught by individuals with knowledge of the game and the skill to convey that knowledge to young people.
- It would help to imbue students with the discipline and drive to practice and sacrifice, to get up after they've been knocked down, to attempt to overcome failure or defeat, to try to excel and succeed.

- It would help to instill students both with goals for themselves and ideals that transcend selfish desires.
- It would help build a foundation of speech and actions that observers call honesty, integrity and sportsmanship.

What would it do if we recruited and demanded coaches of ability, ambition, idealism and character? Because coaches are models and mentors as well as the delivery system of educational athletics, it would tend to give us student-athletes with the same qualities. Qualities desperately needed in our schools, communities and nation.

The applicant pool is not always as broad or deep as we need, but let's make it our goal now and always to do our best to attract and encourage coaches of ability, ambition, idealism and character. School leaders will accomplish this to the degree that they exhibit these traits.■

MAINTAINING QUALITY COACHES

MARCH 1998

No one up or down the chain of command in school sports has more effect on the quality of the athletic program or more influence on student athletes than does the coach.

A good coach can redeem bad decisions by his or her state high school association or local administration; while a bad coach can ruin the best decisions of both.

“A good coach can redeem bad decisions by his or her state high school association or local administration; while a bad coach can ruin the best decisions of both.”

Historically, we in school sports have claimed to be different than non-school sports. We’ve implied that we’re better than non-school sports; and we’ve claimed that one of our differences (perhaps one of our superiorities) is that our coaches are educators.

That stopped being true a long time ago. Many of our coaches have little or no professional or practical preparation in education.

So now we claim that in school sports not every mom and dad can coach. And that’s almost not true anymore. Often, we resort to a warm body, often someone’s mom or dad, to coach the team. And even when someone’s mom or dad isn’t assigned to coach the team, they yell so much from the stands and interfere so much with the assigned coach that they might as well be the assigned coach. This is why we hear the old joke about a fired coach who said the only

coaching job he would ever take in the future would be at an orphanage.

Coaching has become a revolving door for faculty and nonfaculty coaches alike. The pay is poor, the hours are long, the conditions unattractive.

Can we change the pay? Not enough to matter.

But we can remind coaches that there is no profession quite like coaching,

nowhere that the highs are any higher or the lows are any lower, no person who can shape lives any faster or be remembered any longer than a coach.

Can we change the hours? Not during the season. They are long; they’ll always be long. But most high school coaches complain little about in-season hours. It’s the year-round stuff that kills them and ruins their family lives. So, can we reduce demands out-of-season? Can we develop and adopt policies that lessen demands during the summer and out-of-season during the school year?

This is a tough, thorny, many-sided issue. It runs into parents who think their children would be starters and stars and win college scholarships if only coaches worked with them year-round and traveled with them nationwide.

School administrators and boards of education need to consider policies

to allow their coaches (and athletes) a life away from sports. The MHSAA Representative Council has prepared some recommendations, printed in the MHSAA *Handbook*, that may help develop or improve local policies which, in turn, will help attract and keep quality coaches.

Reducing out-of-season demands is an important component of improving working conditions for coaches, but there is more to be done if we are to maintain quality coaches.

A second equally important component is for coaches to know they have the support of their administration.

If a coach cuts a kid according to the policies and procedures of the school district, the coach shouldn't be second guessed.

Of course, your policies should prohibit coaches from making the cuts which for very good reason infuriate parents, such as cutting for outdoor sports, or keeping 14 kids and cutting only 1 in any sport, or keeping 10 while cutting 5 in volleyball or basketball because this will allow the team members more practice attention and playing time.

Your policies should prohibit such cuts, and your policies should describe how to cut. For example, you should never allow a sign on the door with a list of the kids who have made the team. Your policies should require that your coaches meet face-to-face with the athletes they cut.

Coaches shouldn't be second guessed regarding playing time, and your policies should allow the coach to say, "Parent, this district's policy is

to not discuss playing time complaints except with the student involved."

Coaches shouldn't be second guessed on selecting players' positions and starting line-ups. School policies — read to coaches, athletes and parents alike — should state: "It is district policy that at the sub-varsity level, all who have made every practice and conform to all team policies should have playing time every week. Beyond that, starting teams and playing times are the coach's decision."

A third essential component of a successful effort to slow down the revolving door of coaches is to provide initial and continuing education, as we would expect of any profession and especially of any profession that works with young people.

Several quality coaches education programs are available; and in this state, the MHSAA delivers the Program of Athletic Coaches' Education (PACE) to all corners of the state with a curriculum that is tailored for educational athletics in Michigan.

No coach in Michigan schools needs to feel ill-equipped for his or her job.

Maintaining quality coaches in Michigan schools is tough but not impossible if we prepare them, support them and protect them. Our students deserve these efforts; educational athletics requires we make such efforts.

Administrators and board members, be there stronger for your coaches, and they'll likely be there longer for you.■

PART XI

“OURS IS A MISSION MADE POSSIBLE BY HUMAN BEINGS WHO, FOR THE MOST PART, ARE PURE OF HEART AND PERSISTENT OF EFFORT.”

WHAT A PRIVILEGE!

AUGUST 1994

At the conclusion of a school concert last June, the director told an audience of parents and friends that the group of 25 students standing before them had made teaching a privilege, a vocation rich beyond measure, a job he would trade for no other.

At about the same time, our local newspaper published a list of the top ten students from 45 mid-Michigan schools. I was amazed how many of these students I knew through my work; and I realized how truly blessed I am to have the opportunity to work with so many of the best and brightest students of Michigan.

Almost all of the schools included on their top ten lists several students who had participated in MHSAA tournaments, and many of those students had received MHSAA Scholar-Athlete recognition.

I recognized many students whom I had seen compete in regular season

meets or contests, and many students who were honored at awards banquets where I was privileged to be their guest speaker.

It brought special encouragement for me to see that so many of the top students were also active athletes, that so many of those with the highest grade point averages might also have gained a sense of teamwork and fair play, as well as respect for rules by their interscholastic athletic participation.

Knowledge without character is a dangerous thing. So let us hope that the outstanding students of our state's schools will always have the athletic race to run to help them use their knowledge in the most constructive ways for our state, nation and world.

What a privilege it has been to work with the best and brightest; and what privileges they have before them to create for all of us a better and brighter future. ■

MAKING THE MISSION POSSIBLE

NOVEMBER 1996

There are a lot of people who make our lives miserable. Forget about them for a moment.

Instead, think about the folks who make interscholastic athletic programs operate to the benefit of others, espe-

cially students. And think especially about those who do this without hidden agenda or fanfare. Think about . . .

- Coaches, especially the sub-varsity sort, who give long hours for little pay to conduct practices that pre-

pare athletes for games that crowds and media overlook, and who reveal by example that the mission of athletics is learning more than winning.

- Officials especially those who scramble from work to the 4:00 p.m. games, and the veterans who take games with newcomers.
- Parents, especially those who in spite of knowing their taxes and taxying are essential, still can sit back and watch their teenagers play out their own dreams, not those of their parents.
- Media, especially sports reporters who understand that the news is not their opinion or prediction, but the efforts of students on the field or court of play.
- Athletic Administrators, who day-after-day and night-after-night, without the attention that goes to

the coach on the sideline or the athlete on the playing surface, arrange for the right things to happen so the event is safe and sane. And who on top of a regular season of activities to manage, and maybe even some classroom assignments, will still volunteer to host MHSAA tournaments.

To all of these, the MHSAA thanks you for making the mission possible. This tape will not self-destruct in five seconds. It is a message we will repeat often and stand by always. And when one of these folks fails to accomplish a mission, they will not be disavowed. Rather, they will be thanked for trying, and asked to try again.

Ours is a mission made possible by human beings who, for the most part, are pure of heart and persistent of effort. Thank you. ■

GIVE THANKS

NOVEMBER 1999

I can still recall as if it were yesterday my high school choir director stretching out his arms, throwing back his head, and looking to the heavens when we got a particularly loud and inspirational chord just right. I can remember his eyes welling up with tears when we got a soft, delicate phrasing just right. His love for music and for us was so infectious, he won the hearts of 50 adolescents for music and for him.

When I was a senior, I joked with him that he should be the highest paid employee of the school district. He said he disagreed because the highest paid employee didn't get to see the love and hear the music of 50 kids for 50 minutes every day the way he did. He felt he was the most highly compensated employee in the district.

But ten years later, my mother told me that this choir director had left

teaching for private business. I was incredulous. I couldn't picture Mr. Schultz as anything but a teacher. I was greatly saddened.

Ten years after that, I attended my 20th high school reunion; and the two teachers invited to join the Class of 1966 that night included Mr. Schultz.

That evening, I asked to speak with him privately. I told him I was saddened when I heard he had left teaching and I was still sad, because he was

the best teacher I had in high school. "Why did you leave teaching?" I asked.

He answered, "Because no one told me what you just did."

What a loss for education. And what a difference a word of encouragement might have made.

So this Thanksgiving, let us each seize the opportunity to give thanks for and to give thanks to the most important educators of our lives. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The author participated in academics, athletics and activities at P.J. Jacobs High School in Stevens Point, Wisconsin and at Dartmouth College. After high school teaching and coaching, his professional career included 8 years on the staff of the National Federation of State High School Associations and 5 years on the national staff of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He was named executive director of the MHSAA in 1986. He resides with his wife Peggy, a social worker, in East Lansing. They have two grown sons.

