Let The Games Begin!

We all know that nothing compares to the values taught through education-based high school sports programs. And recent events tell us that we need these games now more than ever.

From a health pandemic unseen in our lifetimes, the lesson taught here is to persevere - to be able to get back up after being knocked down. And from a human relations standpoint, a renewed effort to build bridges across society - to promote unity and equality - an effort that must succeed.

This is the time for schools, administrators, and teacher-coaches to listen to kids and the community. To learn, to understand and respect our diversity - and then turn that positive energy through competition out to our communities - our game opponents - and into the world - to make it a better place to live.

Our challenges in this school year are to bring our young people back to some sense of normalcy, and to have everyone rally around common decency to promote equality. And coaches can be the strongest link with their leadership.

We ask everyone to come together and join us - walk with us - in this quest. Enjoy the game.

— Mark Uyl
MHSAA Executive Director

Let The Games Begin!

As we move from the regular season into tournaments, one of the things that we’ve learned is that there are people on the front lines working hard for you and worthy of your respect.

At this event, the front liners are school administrators creating a safe environment, coaches teaching your kids about the game, and officials applying the rules impartially for fair competition.

Let’s remember and be thankful for the efforts of these people and many others behind the scenes for making today’s game possible.

— Mark Uyl
MHSAA Executive Director
Let The Games Begin!

As we move down the tournament trail, we need to appreciate the opportunity to continue to these games play even more and not make winning and losing a life and death proposition. Because the sun comes up for both teams the next morning. Life goes on. The outcome the game is not life defining.

All too often, this kind of pressure is brought to bear on kids and coaches – and it’s not fair. There’s no doubt we all want to win, but in sports – just like in life – you can’t win all the time.

But you can learn. And that’s what’s more important. That’s what’s life defining.

Enjoy the game today and remember what’s really most important about school sports.

— Mark Uyl
MHSAA Executive Director

(For Use in REGIONAL TOURNAMENT PROGRAMS Only)

Let The Games Begin!

Deep tournament runs are the stuff memories are made of. Congratulations on reaching the final round of this MHSAA Tournament.

We like to talk about the 99 percent factor in high school sports. That for most the participants, this is the biggest athletic stage they’ll ever perform on, and the memories made are what they’ll revisit in reunions for years to come.

For that minute group that are blessed enough to continue playing competitive athletics beyond high school, the day will come in spite of their achievements beyond their prep careers when they’re asked what part of their athletic endeavors they remember most fondly, many will point back to this week – this team – playing with their friends from the neighborhood – the overwhelming community support.

That doesn’t happen anywhere but in high school sports. Good luck today and cherish the good memories.

— Mark Uyl
MHSAA Executive Director

(For Use in QUARTERFINAL/SEMIFINAL TOURNAMENT PROGRAMS)

Let The Games Begin!

Deep tournament runs are the stuff memories are made of. Congratulations on reaching the final round of this MHSAA Tournament.

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That doesn’t happen anywhere but in high school sports. Good luck today and cherish the good memories.

— Mark Uyl
MHSAA Executive Director
Inappropriate adult behavior at high school athletic events in Michigan has reached epidemic proportion.

When more than 2,000 high school athletic directors were asked in a recent national survey what they like least about their job, 62.3% said it was “dealing with aggressive parents and adult fans.”

And the men and women who wear the black and white stripes agree. In fact, almost 80% of officials quit after the first two years on the job, and unruly parents are cited as the reason why. As a result, there is a growing shortage of high school officials here in Michigan, and in some sports like wrestling, swimming, and track and field, the shortage is severe. No officials means no more games.

If you are a parent attending a high school athletic event this fall, you can help by following these six guidelines:

1. Act Your Age. You are, after all, an adult. Act in a way that makes your family and school proud.

2. Don’t Live Your Life Vicariously Through Your Children. High school sports are for them, not you. Your family’s reputation is not determined by how well your children perform on the field of play.

3. Let Your Children Talk to the Coach Instead of You Doing It for Them. High school athletes learn how to become more confident, independent and capable—but only when their parents don’t jump in and solve their problems for them.

4. Stay in Your Own Lane. No coaching or officiating from the sidelines. Your role is to be a responsible, supportive parent—not a coach or official.

5. Remember, Participating in a High School Sport Is Not About Getting a College Scholarship. According to the NCAA, only about 2% of all high school athletes are awarded a sports scholarship, and the total value of the scholarship is only about $18,000.


Purchasing a ticket to a high school athletic event does not give you the right to be rude, disrespectful or verbally abusive. Cheer loud and be proud, but be responsible and respectful. The future of high school sports in Michigan is dependent on you.

— Karissa Niehoff, NFHS Executive Director and Mark Uyl, MHSAA Executive Director
Multi-Sport Participation Report

Nearly 43 percent of athletes at Michigan High School Athletic Association member high schools participated in more than one sport during the 2017-18 school year, according to the first-ever Multi-Sport Participation Survey conducted this spring and inspired by the work of the MHSAA’s Task Force on Multi-Sport Participation.

Early and intense sport specialization has become one of the most serious issues related to health and safety at all levels of youth sports, as overuse injuries and burnout among athletes have been tied to chronic injuries and health-related problems later in life. In early 2016, the MHSAA appointed the Task Force on Multi-Sport Participation as part of a continued effort to promote and protect participant health and address the issues leading to early sport specialization.

While there is a growing amount of research detailing the negative effects of early sport specialization, there is little research on the prevalence of sport specialization, including at the high school level. This MHSAA survey received responses from 79.9 percent of member high schools and will be conducted annually to measure how multi-sport participation exists at schools of different sizes and also the progress being made to increase it at all schools.

“It’s now well-known that students who specialize in one sport year-round are prone to all kinds of health hazards. This is serious business; we have to find out the ways and means to promote the multi-sport experience,” MHSAA Executive Director John E. “Jack” Roberts said. “This survey will help us identify best practices. If I’m an administrator, and another school of the same size and same demographics has twice the multi-sport participation as my school, I want to know why. What are they doing to encourage that culture?”

From schools that responded to this year’s survey, 42.5 percent of students participated in athletics in 2017-18 – 46.3 percent of boys and 38.7 percent of girls. As anticipated, Class D schools enjoyed the highest percentage of athletes among the entire student body, at 55.2 percent, followed by Class C (50.1), Class B (45.1) and Class A (39.1*).

Of those athletes counted by responding schools, 42.8 percent participated in more than one sport – including 44.6 percent of boys and 40.6 percent of girls. Class D again enjoyed the highest percentage of multi-sport athletes, 58.1 percent, followed by Class C (55.2), Class B (46.7) and Class A (35.9*). Similar results for overall sport participation and multi-sport participation relative to enrollment size were seen by further breaking down Class A into schools of fewer than 1,000 students, 1,000-1,500 students, 1,501-2,000 students and more than 2,000 students. For both sport participation as a whole and multi-sport participation specifically, the smallest Class A schools enjoyed the highest percentages, while percentages then decreased for every larger size group of schools.

The MHSAA Task Force on Multi-Sport Participation also recommended measuring multi-sport participation in MHSAA member schools to recognize “achievers” – that is, schools that surpass the norm given their enrollment and other factors that affect school sports participation. An achievement program is being developed for future years, and this year’s survey results will assist in setting a benchmark for that recognition.

In Class A, Marquette (82.6 percent), Grand Rapids Union (74.1) and Holland West Ottawa (74.0) posted the highest percentages of multi-sport athletes. In Class B, four schools achieved at least 80 percent multi-sport participation – Birch Run (87.1), Gladstone (83.8), Clawson (81.0) and Shepherd (80).

Class C saw 13 schools with more than 80 percent of its athletes taking part in more than one sport, led by Ubly (90.2 percent) and Detroit Southeastern (89.2). Four Class D schools responded at higher than 90 percent multi-sport participation – Brethren (95.4), DeTour (94.3), Jackson Christian (91.7) and Waterford Our Lady (90.8).

The full summary report on the Multi-Sport Participation Survey is available on the “Health & Safety” page of the MHSAA Website.

— Geoff Kimmerly
MHSAA Second Half Editor
Get On Your Feet

It’s Time to Define and Defend the Greatest Games We Know

Someplace along the winding road in the long history of interscholastic athletics, gradual change has brought our product to a crossroads. We, in this business of developing the minds, character and bodies of student-athletes, still understand the far-reaching benefits of school-based sports, and the mission of our programs. We understand their importance to community; the incomparable entertainment value for spectators; the bonds built between teacher and student that an hour a day in the classroom usually can’t match; the memories and lessons that last a lifetime.

Somewhere along the way, however, some of the allure seems to have faded in the eyes and minds of others.

• Perhaps it’s the many options available to today’s young people, both in and out of athletics. Where once school sports and a letter jacket were THE thing, now it’s just another thing, with travel programs, virtual reality games, nonstop cable sports coverage and social media competing to fill free time.

• Maybe it’s parents, chasing the misguided dream of athletic scholarships for their children and in the process doling out the promises of untrained coaches intent on building their pocketbooks and reputations over building fundamentals and teamwork in kids.

• It could be that sensational stories from professional and collegiate levels warning of long-range effects of concussions and other sports injuries are causing fear in many parents who are making athletic participation decisions for their children.

• It’s possible that those once relied upon to spread the good word of our good work – our friends in the media – are all gone. Administrators and coaches alike were once on a first-name basis with sportswriters in every community across Michigan. When a feel-good story took place, we knew whom to call to trumpet the news, and when the big game took place, they were sure to be there. The collapse and contraction of newspapers and the rise of faceless bloggers has delivered a blow.

• And, what of respect for authority? We are losing the keepers of our games – the contest officials – in bunches each year. People see the assaults, both verbal and physical, on these special men and women who give far more of their time than they are compensated for and figure it can’t be worth it to become an official, or to continue.

Ultimately, how we got here no longer matters. It’s what we do next. The focus for each school year is to define and defend educational athletics. We know that educational athletics is the best option. We are certain specialization is becoming a real health and safety issue, as real as concussions. We emphasize safety and risk management through our rules and regulations. We will utilize current media to tell our story. In doing so, maybe we can increase our pool of officials as well.

That is the game plan.
School Sports Define Community

Tailgates. Pep rallies. Friday night lights. The new school year is here! And that’s exciting news for student-athletes and high school sports fans alike.

Research shows that being a student-athlete is about a lot more than fun and games. It teaches important life lessons, too. In fact, high school athletes not only have higher grade-point averages and fewer school absences than non-athletes, they also develop the kind of work habits and self-discipline skills that help them become more responsible and productive community members.

Attending high school sporting events teaches important life lessons, too.

"That’s why attending the activities hosted by your high school this fall is so important. It’s not only an opportunity to cheer for your hometown team, it is also an opportunity to celebrate our commonality. And that’s something our country needs right now." — NFHS Executive Director Bob Gardner

Among them, it teaches that we can live in different communities, come from different backgrounds, faiths and cultures, cheer for different teams, and still have a common bond.

That’s why attending the activities hosted by your high school this fall is so important. It’s not only an opportunity to cheer for your hometown team, it is also an opportunity to celebrate our commonality. And that’s something our country needs right now.

The bond we share is mutually supporting the teenagers in our respective communities. We applaud their persistence, tenacity, preparation and hard work, regardless of the color of the uniform they wear. We acknowledge that education-based, high school sports are enhancing their lives, and ours, in ways that few other activities could. And we agree that, regardless of what side of the field we sit on, attending a high school sporting event is an uplifting, enriching, family-friendly experience for all of us.

Many of the high schools in our state lie at the heart of the communities they serve. They not only are educating our next generation of leaders, they also are a place where we congregate, where people from every corner of town and all walks of life come together as one. And at no time is this unity more evident than during a high school athletic event.

This is the beginning of a new school year. Opportunities abound in the classroom and outside it. Let’s make the most of them by attending as many athletic events at the high school in our community as possible.

Turn on the lights, and let the games begin!

— Bob Gardner, NFHS Executive Director
Jack Roberts, MHSAA Executive Director
They don’t make the headlines, their names are not in the box scores and they don’t make the all-star teams. But perhaps the most important individuals in high school sports are the contest officials.

These individuals are so important that, in fact, there would be no organized competitive sports at the high school level without the men and women who officiate these contests every day across the country. Subtract the dedicated men and women who officiate high school sports, and competitive sports would no longer be organized; they would be chaotic.

In some areas of our country, high school officials are retiring faster than new ones are being added. And junior varsity, freshmen and middle school games are being postponed – or even cancelled – because there are not enough men and women to officiate them.

Anyone looking for a unique way to contribute to the local community should consider becoming a registered high school official. For individuals who played sports in high school, officiating is a great way to stay close to the sport after their playing days have ended. Officiating helps people stay in shape, expands their social and professional networks and offers part-time work that is flexible, yet pays. In fact, officiating is a form of community service, but with compensation.

Another benefit of officiating is that individuals become role models so that teenagers in the community can learn the life lessons that high school sports teach. Students learn to respect their opponents and the rules of the game and the importance of practicing good sportsmanship thanks, in part, to those men and women who officiate. And the objectivity and integrity that high school officials display is an example that every young person needs to observe firsthand. In short, communities around the country will be stronger because of the life lessons that high school officials help teach the next generation.

Officiating is a great way to stay connected to sports and to give back to the local high school and community. We need dedicated men and women to become involved so that high school sports can continue to prosper for years to come.

Individuals interested in learning more about becoming a high school official, and beginning the application process, can do so at mhsaa.com/Officials/Begin-Registration

Get in the Game. We Need You!
Concussions on Decline in State

Concussions are down, according to data compiled by the Michigan High School Athletic Association during its third year of collecting head injury reports from member high schools.

The work is not done – but this year’s data reinforces trends that emerged during the first two years of reporting and will assist the MHSAA as it explores solutions to continue reducing the incidence of head injuries in school sports.

The 2017-18 concussion report found a 9.6-percent decrease in the number of confirmed concussions from the previous year. Student-athletes at MHSAA member high schools encountered during 2017-18 a total of 3,580 head injuries – or 4.8 per member school, compared to the 2016-17 average of 5.2. Total participation in MHSAA sports for 2017-18 was 284,920 – with students counted once for each sport he or she played – and only 1.3 percent of participants experienced a head injury, down from 1.4 in 2016-17 and 1.6 percent the first year of the study.

As first mandated in 2015-16, member schools are required to report head injuries to the MHSAA identifying the sport that each student-athlete was participating in and whether the injury was sustained during practice or competition. Schools also are required to designate at which level – varsity, junior varsity or freshman – the injury occurred.

The full report of all head injuries experienced during 2017-18 by student-athletes at MHSAA member high schools – including percentages by sport (per 1,000 participants), gender and team level, as well as data tracking when athletes returned to play – is available on the Health & Safety page of MHSAA.com.

Consistent with the first two years of the study, the MHSAA received data from more than 99 percent of its member high schools after the fall, winter and spring seasons and continued to track each injury report through its conclusion this summer. Member junior high and middle schools also were allowed, although not mandated, to report their potential head injuries; and those findings are not part of the published report.

The decrease in overall head injury reports collected for 2017-18 follows a similar reduction from 2015-16 to 2016-17 – and brings the total decrease to 19.6 percent fewer reports since the first year of the study.

The decreases in reports, both year to year and since the first year of the survey, likely have some relation to year-to-year fluctuation, refinement of the follow-up reporting process and a better understanding by schools of what is not to be included for the survey – including head injuries not diagnosed as concussions and head injuries that did not take place during MHSAA-sponsored activities.

However, the findings of the study – and their similarities to the findings from the first two surveys – has begun to clarify the identification and understanding of trends. Continuing to emerge perhaps most prominently is the higher incidence of concussion reports from girls sports – and pertinent questions about physiological and social causes behind those results.

Although the total number of confirmed concussions was significantly lower again in 2017-18, a number of findings detailing those injuries fell in line with results of the first two surveys.

A total of 2,330 head injuries – or 65 percent – came in competition as opposed to practice. More than half took place during either the middle of practice or middle of competition as opposed to the start or end, and 52 percent of injuries were a result of person-to-person contact.

The MHSAA in 2018-19 is directing its sport committees to focus on a pair of questions – how to increase participation and how to make their specific sports safer – the latter aiming to put some of what has been learned from concussion reporting into practice. The MHSAA is continuing to invite Michigan’s universities, health care systems and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) to take part in analyzing the data and questions that have arisen during the past three years.

— Geoff Kimmerly
MHSAA Second Half Editor

Scan the code to visit the
MHSAA.com
Health & Safety Page
The MHSAA Student Advisory Council is a 16-member group which provides feedback on issues impacting educational athletics from a student’s perspective.

Members of the Student Advisory Council serve for two years, beginning as juniors. Eight new members will be selected annually to the SAC, with nominations made by MHSAA member schools. The Council meets eight times each school year to discuss the educational value of interscholastic athletics, emphasizing scholarship, sportsmanship, safety, scope and student leadership of school sports.

As members of the Student Advisory Council, these students will act as a voice of Michigan’s student-athletes; serving as a student sounding board for the MHSAA’s Representative Council; assist in planning Sportsmanship Summits, Captain’s Clinics and other student leadership events; and assist with medal ceremonies at MHSAA championship events.

For the past seven years the council has organized and administered the “Battle of the Fans” competition to recognize the state’s best and most sportsman-like student sections. This fall the council published its second book for new team captains, with this new one called “The Captain’s Playbook.” In July 2015, the MHSAA rolled out an Online Captains Course hosted by two SAC seniors and featuring SAC members from three different classes.

Embarking on their first years as SAC contributors, representing the Class of 2020, are: Grace Beardsley, Gladwin; Kaitlyn Bricker, Pellston; Nathan Eccles, Port Huron Northern; Jack Fairman, Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook Kingswood; Alexis Mohney, Mattawan; Trevin Phillips, Caro; Isabella Santiago-Lindsay, North Muskegon; and Lance Wiltse, Saginaw Michigan Lutheran Seminary.

The new additions to the SAC will join the Class of 2019 members who were selected a year ago: STaylor Adams, Allendale; Neil Bazaj, Ann Arbor Greenhills; Megan Corbe, St. Joseph; Rachel Cummings, Mayville; Shane Dolan, Clarkston Everest Collegiate; Abigail Nelson, Negaunee. “Over time, we have begun to provide more and more programming which directly serves students other than our postseason tournaments,” said Jack Roberts, executive director of the MHSAA. “Now we can get formal input from the student-athlete leadership of our state, and improve our program to our community leaders of tomorrow.”

2017-18 Student Advisory Council
Row 1: Taylor Adams, Allendale; Megan Corbe, St Joseph; Rachel Cummings, Mayville.

Student Advisory Council Belief Statement
As the voice of Michigan’s student-athletes, the Student Advisory Council’s role is to convey the message of how high school sports are supposed to be played. We are responsible for helping the MHSAA maintain a positive and healthy atmosphere in which interscholastic athletes can thrive.

We believe athletes should be competitive, sportsmanlike and excel academically. We believe students in the stands should have fun, but not take the focus away from the game. We believe coaches should act as teachers, helping student-athletes develop while still keeping high school sports in perspective. We believe that parents should always be positive role models and be supportive of their child’s decisions. We believe officials commit their own time to high school sports and respect should always be shown and given to them.

The most important goal for student-athletes is to enjoy high school sports while keeping a high level of respect between all those involved in the games.
Who’s On Your List? Check it Twice!

Soon the holiday season will be upon us, and folks will be sending greetings and gifts out to friends and loved ones, and it’s also a good time for us to think about those we should acknowledge for their behind the scenes roles in conducting our educational athletic programs.

This is not an all-inclusive list, but it should get you thinking about some specific folks you might want to send a card to, or just take an extra moment to tell them thank you when you see them during this time of year for helping make what takes place between the lines possible.

Let’s start with folks in the game administration department. These are your people who run the clock and the scoreboard, drag the down and distance chains on the sidelines, keep the scorebook, and announce the lineups. They are generally unseen to the public, and even the PA announcer should be a part of the background noise of the event. And if you feel compelled to buy one of this group a gift, some new vests for the chain gang would be appreciated!

And then there’s the athletic trainers and team doctors. They get kids medically qualified to play and take care of everything from bumps and bruises to cramps and concussions. The ability to have a trainer available is a blessing every school should fight to keep in the budget during these tight economic times; and we’re also thankful for the team docs who offer their services at no or greatly reduced costs.

How about the team managers and statisticians? Not every kid can play the game or make the team. I was one of those kids growing up.

It takes more than players and coaches to provide a lifetime’s supply of high school sports memories. This holiday season, remember everyone who makes your athletic programs special.

But they want to be a part of the program, and they give their heart and soul to make sure the players have water, that equipment is in the right place at the right time on practice and game day, sometimes wash uniforms and perform a bevy of things a lot of people don’t think about or take for granted.

Booster clubs place a lot of folks into working roles at games, and try to spread the tasks around so that parents can still enjoy their kid’s games. I never appreciated this until my wife and I got called in to help with concessions as our kids were going through school, and how much work it truly was for even that one task to get enough bodies in place to be able to properly serve fans on game night.

And then there are those Jackson Browne referred to in one of his songs as the “roadies” – the first to come and the last to leave. The school maintenance personnel who get the bleachers pulled out and put back, and who make it all clean before, and cleaner after the game. That school athletic administrator, and of course, the athletic department secretary.

To all of these people and others who help support the high school athletic experience, we should show an attitude of gratitude at all times, but during this upcoming holiday season, a little extra thank you would simply be nice.

— John Johnson
MHSAA Communications Director

This commentary first aired on the radio program “This Week in High School Sports,” broadcast on over 40 radio stations across the state, and can be heard on-demand on the MHSAA Internet Broadcast Network – mhsaanetwork.com.
One of the apparent conclusions of the MHSAA “Have Your Say” online opinion poll was that the character of school sports is key to the appeal of school sports. This is true for both sponsoring school personnel and those participants and spectators involved in school sports.

This suggests that to keep our core customers, we must preserve our core characteristics. That whatever changes occur in school styles and structures, we must maintain by our policies and programs the features and values which our core customers have experienced and both want and expect to continue.

It may sometimes feel that we are swimming against the current of public opinion when we enforce rules that define student eligibility or the limits of competition and travel, but the development and implementation of such restrictions might be essential to the expectations of our core constituents for the experience they remember for themselves and want for their children or team.

Just because schools change, it is not necessary that rules of school sports change as well. Sometimes, perhaps. But not always or even often. Leadership must always consider the program without a rule before we do away with the rule.

Schools seek to join the MHSAA because of the positive reputation of the organization and prestige of its programs. It is not too strong to state that schools seek MHSAA membership precisely because there are rules. Just as participation by students is more valuable to them and schools where standards of eligibility and conduct are higher, so is membership by schools in an organization more valuable where such standards are developed and enforced.

The Culting of Brands is a good book with a bad title in which author Douglas Atkin writes about the success of “a meaning-driven brand.” He says, “The product carries the message and then becomes it.” These kinds of brands, he says, are really beliefs. “They have morals – embody values.” They “stand up for things. They work hard; fight for what is right.”

Ultimately, it is exactly this that is expected of the high school brand of competitive athletics in Michigan.

— John E. “Jack” Roberts
MHSAA Executive Director

The character of school sports remains key to the appeal of school sports. Adherence to rules and regulations is part of the character-building process.
What Endless Argument?

In my daily pan through a variety of newspaper websites recently, I found a story about a high school football event Labor Day weekend which was designed to help pursue what its creator called the endless argument – which state plays the best high school football?

In pursuit of this Holy Grail, teams from seven states – including Alabama, Florida and Utah – are traveling to Ohio; and another group of teams from Georgia, Ohio and Pennsylvania are trekking to play in Texas. Sponsors, of course, are paying most of the travel expenses of the teams, but I pity the poor parent who has to drive the 1,800 mile, 26-hour route from Sandy, Utah to Canton, Ohio. For that matter, in four other matchups in this event, fans will have to travel 1,000 or more miles one-way; and three additional games will require round trips of over 1,000 miles for their followers.

Doing the math, the average round trip for those eight games I just mentioned is about 2,200 miles. So if your car gets what is supposed to be the average miles per gallon – an optimistic 27 – you’ll be spending about $325 on gas at four dollars a gallon to get to the site. One person flying – for example – from Pittsburgh to Dallas for one of these monumental games is about $350 with a Saturday night stayover – so figure in another $50 to $100 for that, plus either cab fare or a rental car, and food. Plus, after the $14 admission price for adults ($16 the day of the game), you really pay a premium for that hot dog and soda at these stadiums compared to your local high school field. And remember, that’s just one person.

So now you’ve spent your family’s vacation money for the year on this trip. The school may have traded in a home game with a bigger payday to benefit all of its sports teams. But for what? Oh yeah, settling the endless argument. What endless argument?

There’s no realistic argument to be had about which state plays better football. These games are more about feeding the college sports junkie’s need to know where their next recruit is coming from. Comparing teams and states will always be an apples and oranges situation. The real argument is about perspective. About keeping our athletic programs’ priorities in line with the educational responsibility that schools have.

National events and national travel for the few elite teams and individuals is not a responsible way to conduct a program of educational athletics. These events skew our perspective and open the door to the same kinds of abuses that occur at other levels of sports sponsored by other groups.

Besides, with the cost of travel even from county to county becoming an issue, the responsible conduct of school sports programs means keeping them what they are truly supposed to be – educational in scope and local. Schools have already been looking for several years to keep their schedules and travel local. Participation in the school athletic program is no less beneficial because you played your neighbor as opposed to a New Yorker or a Nebraskan. There are lots of other opportunities in life to travel the country, and school sports shouldn’t be one of them.

It’s going to be another great high school football season here in Michigan. A big part of the beauty of the games is when two communities come together to watch their children play. Where the city or the county championship is sometimes a bigger thing than winning any state tournament. We don’t need to compare ourselves with the rest of the country about playing ability when our focus is on learning life’s lessons locally – which is truly what high school sports are all about.

— John Johnson
MHSAA Communications Director

This commentary first aired on the radio program MHSAA Perspective, broadcast on over 40 radio stations across the state, and can be heard on-demand on the MHSAA Internet Broadcast Network – www.mhsaanetwork.com.
Crushed by Parental Expectations

As the sun set on a November Saturday afternoon, I watched a group of parents sow the seeds for what they thought would be the achievement of an ultimate goal for their children's team. In reality, what they reaped was far, far different than their expectations.

After reaching an unexpected level of success at the end of that season, the ink was barely dry on the final statistics when the parents of the team's top performers were huddling, planning to make the upcoming seasons even better – and all within earshot of an overeager young assistant coach.

The plan was simple – almost too simple. If the amount of work put in during that season was increased to the levels of teams which had more success, then they would put themselves in a position to finish higher in next year’s tournament.

Influenced by the wishes of the parents, the young assistant coach put the team through a more demanding training regimen during the off-season. The team turned in a higher finish in the following year's tournament, and with most of the members still being underclassmen, the expectations were even higher for the next season.

An even more demanding off-season followed, with plans to attend the most intense team camp available; all under the tutelage of the young assistant coach, eager to please the desires of the parents.

But like the seeds in Biblical parable that fell on weed-infested ground, no fruit would be realized the following season. Injuries and illness beset the team, in part because of the training program. The young assistant coach pushed the team regardless. The parents pushed the team regardless. This was going to be their season. But whose season was it?

The end of the season brought a mixed bag of results, but less successful than the previous season and certainly not with the expected results.

And when the sun was setting that November as the season concluded, some alumni from the team were commiserating with the long-time head coach, who admitted to simply getting out of the way of the overenthusiastic parents and the overaggressive young assistant coach – feeling helpless to do anything about what happened.

This is a very real story, but the very scary thing about it is that it could have happened, and unfortunately does happen, anywhere and everywhere. Anywhere where distorted perspectives meet is a recipe for danger – and where young people's athletic experiences get crushed by their parent's expectations.

— John Johnson
MHSAA Communications Director
Wasn’t That a Great Game?

On average, I get out to one or two high school sporting events a week, and it’s not unusual to be talking to someone after the game and the first thing out of their mouth is, “That game was a great advertisement for high school sports!”

And they walk away with the biggest smile on their face, sometimes even if the team they were rooting for lost; because they enjoyed so much watching school children play these games.

I had another one of those nights recently, something which had all the elements going in for a great game; and at the end of the evening, something that even the best copywriters on Madison Avenue or in Hollywood couldn’t duplicate.

First, it was a natural rivalry between two neighboring schools, one where the visiting team was the favorite. Second, the gymnasium was packed. Third, the student sections were enthusiastic, but they didn’t go over the line – not even once.

The favored visitors played the part for the first 10 minutes or so, but the home team clawed and fought back to tie the score with a buzzer-beater just before halftime. The home team carried that momentum into the second half and built a double-digit lead midway through the final period.

The determined visitors applied a full-court press and rallied to tie the score in the final minute; and had there been just one more second on the clock, their fast break at the end of regulation would have resulted in a victory.

The overtime period went back and forth, with the home team taking possession with about 90 seconds to play with the score tied and the point guard dribbling at midcourt in a suspensebuilding fashion to milk most of the remaining time until being fouled.

Making only one of two free throws, the home team scrambled back to thwart flurry of shots and put-backs by the visitors that kept falling off the rim as the noise levels in the gym reached deafening levels.

A home team player is fouled with three seconds to go while grabbing a rebound, and can only make one of two charity tosses. The visitors still have life, but a midcourt shot as the final buzzer sounds misses the mark.

The Greeks have a word for what happened next – pandemonium. The celebration was on for the home team as the visitors cheering section clapped to support its team. The players from the home team quickly extracted themselves from the sea of humanity on the floor to pay their respects to their opponents by shaking hands.

At the end of the court, the winning teacher-coach composed himself after the emotional contest to talk with a couple of local television reporters and expressed the pride he felt for his team and the respect he had for the opponent. No talk about any one player; and the one player the TV cameras pointed at next said the same things...and I can only figure that he must have been the team captain; as he turned from the interview, one of the cheerleaders gave him a big hug.

And as the crowd began to disperse, I ran into a few people I knew, and the first words out of their mouths were, “Wasn’t that game a great advertisement for high school sports? It had everything you’d ever want in a game!” And they walked away with big smiles on their faces.

Of course, this scene was the same in dozens of locations around the state that night, where people still gather to watch kids play in front of their fellow students for love of the game, for pride in their school and community, as part of the educational process. A script which sells itself and the beauty of high school sports.

— John Johnson
MHSAA Communications Director
They say that five dollars doesn’t get you a whole lot these days, but it made for a pretty enjoyable evening recently on a trip to a small town in Southern Michigan.

This was a night that two neighboring schools were going to have at it, and it had all the makings of a great evening.

First of all, pulling into a town I’d never been to before, I appreciated the large red and white signs down the main street pointing to all of the school facilities, but even without those, I could have probably found the place easily enough.

The only other visible signs of life as I arrived were a car parked in front of the local pizza parlor waiting for the game to end so it would get some business, and a person working at the presidential primary folding up the “Vote Here” sign at the closing of a polling place.

Cars were parked around the entire school, which I only had to circle once before finding a spot next to the visiting team bus. For the most part, everyone in the two communities was already inside.

The wonderful smell of popcorn called you inside as you hit the entrance to the building, where a lady wearing a school sweatshirt stating it was the home of the gymnasium named for the long-time athletic director was selling tickets.

A similar sign was on the wall beneath the scoreboard in the gym and I asked the AD how he felt about it. He was humbled for a moment, but then said, “You know, most of the time they do that kind of stuff after you’re dead and gone.”

We started our evening off with a good laugh and he then quickly pulled out a bag of popcorn and said was the best popcorn in the conference. Based on my travels, I’d say he was right; it might even make my top 10 list.

I got a little history lesson before the game about how a stage at the end of the gymnasium had once existed, and how it was now louder since a wall replaced it as part of a new auxiliary gym. Like the popcorn, I certainly was in no position to argue. It was plenty loud enough in there, especially when I saw for the first time at a high school game a gong about 5 feet in diameter being used by the pep band as the players on the home team were introduced.

And speaking of introductions, that was the only time the public address announcer used the microphone all night long. In a small town, you don’t really need it – everyone already knows your name.

There was a pregame ceremony to honor the home school’s baseball team for its sportsmanship when it won the MHSAA tournament last spring. About every player on the varsity basketball team and a number of the kids from the junior varsity basketball team, came out to center court. In fact, I think I only saw one kid in street clothes in the group. I’ll assume that most of these kids go straight from one school sports uniform in the fall to another in the winter and a third in the spring – maybe even a fourth!

So the night goes on and the neighborhood rivalry plays itself out. It was a loud, hot night in the old small-school gym. The kind of night I remember well growing up. A night where everything that’s good about high school sports was on display.

Like the old John Cougar Mellencamp song says, “I don’t have anything against a big town, but I can’t forget where I come from.” I still have a ball watching a game in small-town gym.

— John Johnson
MHSAA Communications Director

This commentary first aired on the radio program MHSAA Perspective, broadcast on over 40 radio stations across the state, and can be heard on-demand on the MHSAA Internet Broadcast Network – www.mhsaanetwork.com.
A recent Harris poll found that two out of three American adults don't know all of the words to "The Star-Spangled Banner" - and many don't even know which song is our National Anthem or why it was written.

The song of our nation was penned by Washington attorney Francis Scott Key at a dramatic moment during the War of 1812. On the night of September 13, 1814, Key watched as our country was attacked by the British navy at Fort McHenry. After watching the rockets' red glare and bombs bursting in air throughout the night, dawn broke. Key was expecting to find Baltimore firmly under British control, but was stunned to see a battered but still flying American flag waving in the sunrise. So inspired was Key that he wrote the poem, "The Star-Spangled Banner." Set to a tune attributed to John Stafford Smith, "To Anacreon in Heaven," it became America's national anthem in 1931.

There has been a noticeable decrease in the respect given the National Anthem presentation over the last few years. Whether it is team members joining hands and swinging them back and forth during the anthem or a student body screaming for the start of a competition over the last few notes of the song, or the prevalent wearing of hats and talking on cell phones during the anthem, school sports provide us with the vehicle to remind everyone of the manner in which we pay respect to the flag, our nation, and the competition that it precedes.

Students, participants and spectators are reminded that when the National Anthem is played, they should remove their hats, stand at attention, face the flag, and place their right hand over their heart from the first note of the music until the last note.

Learn more about the National Anthem Program on the web at: nationalanthemproject.org

O say, can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.
O say does that star spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free,
In non-school sports, you can make the team. But in high school sports, you can make history.

Wearing the uniform of your high school comes with a big responsibility. Your community cheers for you. Your teammates count on you. And you have the opportunity to make history by competing for a state championship. Do you have what it takes?

This message presented by the Michigan High School Athletic Association and the Michigan Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association.
MUTUAL RESPECT AND SPORTSMANSHIP COME WITH YOUR HIGH SCHOOL UNIFORM.
In non-school sports, nobody’s cheering for you. In high school sports, everybody is.

Nothing brings communities together like high school sports. Whether it’s playing a Friday night game in a sold-out gym or making a run at a conference championship, nothing compares to the thrill of wearing the uniform of your high school.

This message presented by the Michigan High School Athletic Association and the Michigan Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association.
ACHIEVEMENT AND SATISFACTION
COME WITH YOUR HIGH SCHOOL UNIFORM.
Is there a Cap on your Season?

School Sports: Excellence Without Excess
School & Sports: plenty of room for both

Excellence Without Excess
If this is your offseason, next year's opponent is already ahead.

GET UP!
GET ACTIVE!

PLAY:
Preparation Lasts All Year
When you're dreaming of next season, your opponents are preparing for it

GET UP!
GET ACTIVE!

PLAY:
Preparation Lasts All Year
What If?

The easiest shot to take in high school sports – or all levels of sports for that matter – is one that attempts to show up the game officials. Whether it’s coaches, or players or spectators; everyone has an opinion about every call, and they’re all increasingly becoming less inhibited about showing it.

The people with the poorest view of the play physically, certainly the poorest view of the play from a perspective standpoint, and generally with the least knowledge of the rules and their application; are the quickest to loudly bellyache, gesture, and just flat out act out poorly when they don’t like a call.

The non-verbal communication alone – the mimicking of the throwing of a flag or an official’s signal, first by coaches, then by players (and not always in that order) – catches the wave and feeds the fans in the stands like fresh meat being given to a pack of piranhas.

And it doesn’t stop there, the whining finds its way online after the game, sometimes even during the game, where know-it-alls brave enough to spew their venom, but so cowardly they hide behind a screen name (even those participants who claim to be game officials) turn a holding, or a yellow card, or a lift, or a pick off, or a block-charge call into a matter of life-or-death.

OK, it’s a well-known fact that criticism of an official’s call goes with the territory. When you put on the stripes, you know it’s coming, and you need to have the backbone to deal with it.

But let’s turn the tables for just a minute. A game of what if. A game of man bites dog.

What if the official got in the face of a 14- to 17-year-old football player and mocked him for not doing what he thought he should have done on that play, gesturing wildly to show him what he thought was the error of his ways?

What if the official ran over to the bench, or the dugout, stood next to the coach and looked out over the field and told the coach – “you know what coach? Even though we’re 30 to 40 yards away, you really can see better over here.”

And what if an official went up to the top row of the bleachers to grab that loud, obnoxious fan; escort that person down to the playing surface, place that person in the spot the official was occupying and handed them the whistle?

Of course, there would be an even larger outcry of outrage. Officials can’t do that!

But what if the officials treated others they way others treat them. What if the man bites the dog back? I think there would be a little less, maybe even a lot less, of the abuse these people have heaped upon them.

The real answer to this is rooted in the principles of sportsmanship. At least at the school level, administrators can describe and demand the behavior they want of their coaches, players and spectators. Coaches need to deliver and model good sporting behavior, and in turn, the players will follow. If these first two groups would stop showing up the officials, the fans would be less likely to be outwardly critical as well. And our games would be better off for it.

— John Johnson
MHSAA Communications Director

This commentary first aired on the radio program MHSAA Perspective, broadcast on over 40 radio stations across the state, and can be heard on-demand on the MHSAA Internet Broadcast Network – mhsaanetwork.com.
During the 2017-18 school year, 93 high school juniors and seniors participated as MHSAA Legacy officials. The year’s class brings the total to 1,661 students who have become registered and active officials during their junior or senior year of high school through the Legacy program.

The program was conceived by officials, teachers of officiating classes and staff members of the MHSAA and first implemented in 1992.

Basic to the program is the belief that properly and adequately coached from the outset, young people with an interest in officiating can develop as capable officials so that in the future they will be prepared to follow in the footsteps of their adult guide. It is a goal of the program that student officials learn the correct way to perform as an official.

Each student official (high school junior) must be prepared to dedicate time to study, practice and learn officiating skills, as well as officiate 7th and 8th-grade contests. Student officials must understand the need for time commitment before they embark on this experience.

The student’s guide is a veteran official who will chart the course, help arrange contests and introduce the student to the practices and procedures of officiating. Assistance with tests and clinic experiences is a part of this responsibility. The teaching guide accompanies the student official to MHSAA rules meetings.

Former athletes remain one of the basic populations from which MHSAA contest officials are developed. They enjoy athletics, have an understanding of the games and a love of the competition. In addition, athletes have an understanding and appreciation of the sportsmanship that is important to competition.

Becoming a member of the officiating “team” through the Legacy program allows students to remain connected to the sport which was enjoyed so much as a player.

For more information regarding the Legacy Program, please contact the MHSAA, 1661 Ramblewood Dr., East Lansing, MI, 48823, 517-332-5046, or visit the Officials page of the MHSAA Website at mhsaa.com.
Thousands of students voluntarily extend their classroom day by taking part in extra-curricular activities, often improving their academic achievements in the process.

The value that such programs play in the total education of a high school student is highlighted through the Michigan High School Athletic Association/Farm Bureau Insurance Scholar-Athlete Award, which will award $1,000 scholarships to 32 top student-athletes and recognize over 2,000 other outstanding individuals in 2018-19.

Underwritten by Farm Bureau Insurance, the Scholar-Athlete Award presents scholarships to students in every MHSAA enrollment classification. The scholarships may be used at any institution of higher learning.

"It is amazing to see the number of young people who are proven achievers in academics and activities," said Mark Uyl, executive director of the MHSAA. "At a time when our educational system is coming under fire, the Scholar-Athlete Award is something that proves how important athletics are to the development of a well-rounded person."

Students applying for the Scholar-Athlete Award must be graduating during the 2017-18 school year, carry a 3.5 grade-point average, and have previously won a letter in a varsity sport that the MHSAA sponsors postseason competition.

Applicants will also be required to show involvement in other school-community activities and submit an essay on the importance of sportsmanship in educational athletics.

Application materials can be found on the MHSAA Website, mhsaa.com.

Each MHSAA member school is allowed to nominate a number of student-athletes based on the size of the school. Class A schools can nominate six boys and six girls, Class B four boys and four girls, Class C three boys and three girls and Class D two boys and two girls. The first 30 scholarships will be awarded based on this graduated scale, with two additional scholarships intended for minority applicants.

A committee composed of school administrators from across the state will select regional and statewide winners.

Farm Bureau, a long-time supporter of MHSAA activities, also sponsors other educationally oriented programs. Executive Vice President Jim Robinson notes the company’s pleasure with the awards program.

"All of us at Farm Bureau Insurance are proud to reward special, well-rounded young people who have developed both physical and academic skills," Robinson said. "To accomplish both while giving themselves to their schools and their communities are outstanding traits that must be recognized and rewarded."

The 32 scholarship recipients will be recognized at the MHSAA Boys Basketball Finals at the Breslin Student Events Center in East Lansing on March 16, 2019.

Recipients of the Scholar-Athlete Award are honored during festivities at the MHSAA Boys Basketball Finals. More information about the awards may be obtained by contacting your local school principal, athletic director or guidance counselor. Application Forms can be found at mhsaa.com.
When some MHSAA officials throughout the state say they officiate “for the kids,” they mean it.

Several MHSAA Approved Officials Associations have taken on leading roles in “Officials for Kids,” donating time and money to statewide Children’s Miracle Network hospitals to help support a variety of worthwhile programs, all geared toward helping children when they most need it.

Officials for Kids came to fruition in Lansing in 2003 to support local fundraising efforts at Sparrow Regional Children’s Hospital; specifically organized to construct and maintain a dedicated pediatric emergency room and waiting room.

Successes in mid-Michigan soon led to other areas around the state expressing interest in the program. In recent years, Officials for Kids has expanded statewide to assist the four Children’s Miracle Network hospitals in Michigan on a variety of projects.

The MHSAA proudly serves the program and its supporters from an administrative standpoint – helping to facilitate and coordinate statewide objectives with the officials and hospitals that care most about Officials for Kids. CMN hospitals receive 100 percent of all Officials for Kids donations and contributions.

The Children’s Miracle Network is a non-profit organization which raises funds for 174 children’s hospitals across North America. The four CMN hospitals in Michigan are William Beaumont Hospital in Detroit, Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital in Grand Rapids, Hurley Medical Center in Flint, and Sparrow Regional Children’s Center in Lansing.

The Officials for Kids program has three primary objectives for the children’s hospitals in Michigan. First, to promote healthy habits and lifestyle choices for Michigan youth. Second, to support outstanding health care for Michigan children. And third, to enhance the public image of sports officials across the state.

“Sports officials work with young people every day,” said MHSAA Executive Director John E. “Jack” Roberts. “I can’t think of any better way to help kids than to support this worthwhile effort in our own communities.”

Among fundraising efforts, one of the most popular and effective campaigns is the Give-A-Game program in which officials pledge to donate a game check or certain dollar amount for contests worked.

Most recently, the West Michigan Officials Association, sponsored a Visually Impaired Sports and Activity Day for kids in East Grand Rapids as part of its work with the Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital. The sponsorship dollars were raised in part through a Give-A-Game program.

Other CMN hospitals benefitting from the OFK effort are Sparrow Hospital in Lansing, where funds raised are going toward the construction of a new pediatric emergency room, in large part due to the efforts of the Capital Area Officials Association; Hurley Medical Center in Flint, where officials are helping that hospital in its efforts to fight childhood obesity; and Beaumont Hospital in Detroit, where a Referees For Reading program has been launched to provide books for pediatric unit patients, and where Metro Detroit Officials Association members spend time reading to patients.

More information about Officials For Kids can be found on the Officials page of MHSAA.com.
What Is Sportsmanship?

Sportsmanship is...  

- Sportsmanship is the practice of playing fair, of taking defeat without complaint or victory without gloating and treating opponents with respect, generosity, courtesy, etc.

Sportsmanship is...  

- Sportsmanship is a demonstration of generosity and genuine concern for others. It is a concrete measure of the understanding and commitment to fair play, ethical behavior and integrity.

Sportsmanship is...  

- Sportsmanship is a blending of cheers for “your team” and applause for the “opponents,” observing the letter and spirit of the rules and showing consideration for others.

Sportsmanship is...  

- Sportsmanship is respect. Respect for others and for one's self.

Sportsmanship is...  

- Sportsmanship is all this and much more.

Sportsmanship is...  

- For a coach, sportsmanship may be accepting a "questionable" call without protest.

Sportsmanship is...  

- For an athlete, it may be extending a helping hand to an opponent who is down.

Sportsmanship is...  

- For a spectator, it may be cheering for his team when it loses, and applauding the opponent when it wins.

Sportsmanship is...  

- For an official, it may be showing restraint when verbally assaulted by coaches, athletes and spectators.

Sportsmanship is...  

- Sportsmanship encompasses all that which is good in human nature.

Sportsmanship is...  

- Sportsmanship is citizenship in action.

Good Sports Are Winners!
A Letter From An Official To Parents:

This is something that I wanted to do for a long time. I want to talk to the guy that is up in the stands and as usual is yelling at the officials.

Sir,

I want to make a statement about the noise you make. At every game you do your best to spoil it for every one. When you are not at a basketball game, you are a perfect gentleman. Today it is appropriate to tell you what most athletic directors and coaches would like to tell you. Before we start, it might be better to share a story that happened to me recently.

The time was last year at a tournament in Grand Rapids. One of the teams involved was called the Spartans, which had an outstanding player who was quite a treat to officiate and watch play. The game itself was not too exciting. The Spartans were winning easily and tension was low. This was my fourth game in less than 24 hours, my knees were hurting and I just wanted to finish the game.

As the game progressed, a voice from the stands could be heard. This person was making one comment after another. The targets of course were the officials. I was really focused on the game and it didn't bother me. He presented nothing new so I made moving the game along a priority and tried to ignore it.

Later in the game I called a routine foul and the girls lined up for the shot. As they did so a voice came from the stands with another criticism. Again I ignored the voice. The girls on both teams made comments about who that was up in the stands. You see, he was spoiling the game for everyone.

One girl looked up and said to no one in particular, "That's my dad, I wish he would just go home." Her eye caught mine for just a brief second. She dropped her head quickly and her hands went to both knees. The hurt in her eyes told the story.

I don't know what you're thinking or what you are trying to achieve, but all it does is distract the players. You are an embarrassment to your school and your team. The hurt you cause to your son or daughter cannot be measured. I am speaking to you for their sake. Relax, enjoy the game, cheer wildly for your team. If you want to make a criticism, do so quickly and then let it drop. The players want to play and not listen to you the entire game. The game belongs to them. This is their time. Let them play.

Good Sports Are Winners!
Are you on the right road?

Sportsmanship: No Alternate Routes!

Good Sports Are Winners!
SPORTSMANSHIP

HOW'S YOUR REFLECTION?

Good Sports Are Winners!