



The Case for High School Activities

Introduction

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and its membership believe that interscholastic sports and fine arts activities promote citizenship and sportsmanship to the 11 million students who participate nationwide. Activity programs instill a sense of pride in community, teach lifelong lessons of teamwork and self-discipline and facilitate the physical and emotional development of our nation's youth.

There is no better time than today to assert "The Case for High School Activities." Education and community leaders across the nation must be made aware of the facts contained in this material. From interscholastic sports to music, theatre and debate, activities enrich a student's high school experience, and the programs must be protected and kept alive.

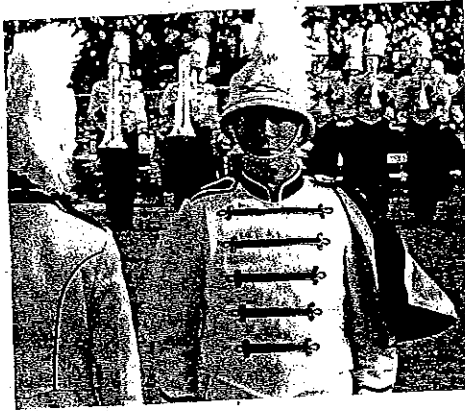
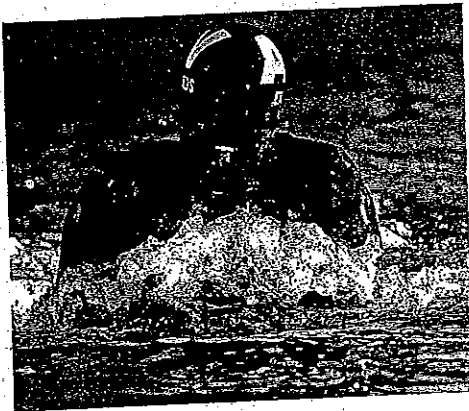
At a cost of only one to three percent (or less in many cases) of a school's overall budget, high school activity programs are one of the best bargains around. It is in these vital programs – sports, music, speech, theatre, debate – where young people learn lifelong lessons that complement the academic lessons taught in the classroom.

To review the complete report, you can download it from the NFHS Web site, www.nfhs.org.

Benefits of Cocurricular Activities

- **Activities Support the Academic Mission of Schools.** They are not a diversion but rather an extension of a good educational program. Students who participate in activity programs tend to have higher grade-point averages, better attendance records, lower dropout rates and fewer discipline problems than students generally.
- **Activities are Inherently Educational.** Activity programs provide valuable lessons for practical situations – teamwork, sportsmanship, and hard work. Through participation in activity programs, students learn





self-discipline, build self-confidence and develop skills to handle competitive situations. These are qualities students need if they are to become responsible adults, productive citizens and skilled professionals.

- **Activities Foster Success in Later Life.** Participation in high school activities is often a predictor of later success – in college, a career and becoming a contributing healthy member of society.

Following are some of those benefits, with case studies, where applicable, listed to document the benefits. While many of the studies refer to "extracurricular activities," the NFHS prefers the use of the term "cocurricular activities," believing that activities support the academic mission of schools and are inherently educational.

Participation in high school activities is a valuable part of the overall high school experience.

- In their 2006 report, *Effects of Title IX and Sports Participation on Girls' Physical Activity and Weight*, Professors Kaestner and Xu of the University of Illinois at Chicago, found that the dramatic increase in sports participation among girls in the aftermath of the passage of Title IX was associated with an increase in physical activity and an improvement in weight and body mass among adolescent girls. They conclude that Title IX and the increase in athletic opportunities among adolescent females it engendered had a beneficial effect on the health of adolescent girls.

Students who compete in high school activity programs make higher grades and have better attendance.

- According to the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, students who participate in the arts nine hours or more each week for at least a year are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement, win a school attendance award, participate in a science and math fair and win an award for writing. They are also three times more likely to be elected to class office.
- A Minnesota State High School League survey of 300 Minnesota high schools showed that the average GPA of a student-athlete was 2.84, compared with 2.68 for the non-participating student, and that student-athletes missed an average of only 7.4 days of school each year, compared with 8.8 for the non-participating student. (Trevor Born. High Standard for GPA, in *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, May 14, 2007.)



Participation in activity programs yields positive results after high school as well.

- Participation in extracurricular activities provides all students – including students from disadvantaged backgrounds, minorities and those with less-than-distinguished academic achievements in high school – a measurable and meaningful gain in their college admissions test scores according to researchers Howard T. Everson and Roger E. Millsap, writing for the College Entrance Examination Board in 2005.
- In a 2006 research project published by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE), it was found that 18- to 25-year-olds who participate in sports activities while in high school were more likely than nonparticipants to be engaged in volunteering, voting, feeling comfortable speaking in public settings, and watching news (especially sport news).

From a cost standpoint, activity programs are an exceptional bargain when matched against the overall school district's education budget.

Examinations of various school districts' budget information across the country reveals that activity programs make up very small percentages of school budgets. In the 2007 school year, the city of Chicago's Public School Board of Education's overall budget was \$4.6 billion, and activity programs received only \$36.2 million. In the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area, activity programs received only \$4.7 million of the overall \$1.2 billion budget for 2008. Finally, in the Seattle Public School System, its Board of Education has a 2008 overall budget of \$339.7 million, while setting aside \$3.2 million for activity programs. All of these examples are less than one percent. There is no better or more effective investment being made in America's education programs today.



Activity programs fulfill students' basic needs, help in students' attitudes toward self and school, and minimize dropout and discipline problems.

- Researcher Richard Learner, writing in *Promoting Positive Youth Development through Community After-School Programs*, found that informal educational and developmentally supportive experiences offered to young people in the context of after-school or community-based programs are a potent source of resources – increasing the probability of positive development among youth.
- In 2003, the *Journal of Adolescent Research* reported that extracurricular activity participation is linked to lower rates of dropping out of school, greater civic involvement and higher levels of academic achievement. Moreover, research tracking participation from eighth through twelfth grades and examining outcomes in the postsecondary years concluded that consistent participation has positive effects.

Cocurricular activities teach lessons that lead to better citizens.

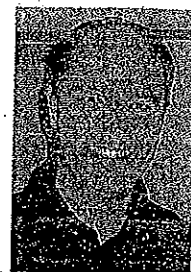
- Nancy Darling, et al., writing in the 2005 *Journal of Leisure Research*, notes that extracurricular activities allow youth to form new connections with peers and acquire social capital. Activity programs are one of the few contexts, outside of the classroom, where adolescents regularly come in contact with adults to whom they are not related.
- Students who spend no time in extracurricular activities are 49 percent more likely to use drugs and 37 percent more likely to become teen parents than those who spend one to four hours per week in extracurricular activities (United States Department of Education. *No Child Left Behind: The facts about 21st Century Learning*. Washington, DC: 2002.)



About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and fine arts. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and fine arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,000 high schools and 11 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 7½ million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; produces publications for high school coaches, officials and athletic directors; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, spirit coaches, speech and debate coaches and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS Web site at www.nfhs.org.

National Federation of State High School Associations
PO Box 690 | Indianapolis, IN 46206
Phone: 317-972-6900 | Fax: 317-822-5700
www.nfhs.org



Jeff Janssen

Coaching Today's Athlete

Millennial-generation athletes require a different approach

By JEFF JANSSEN, Janssen Sports Leadership Center

Are today's athletes different than years past? Do you at times feel a little disconnected from the current generation?

Fortunately, you don't need to be up on all the latest catch phrases, texting, hottest websites and dance moves, yet you do have to understand what makes today's generation of athletes tick and how to coach them accordingly.

According to authors Neil Howe and William Strauss of an interesting book called "Millennials Go to College," today's Millennial generation (generally regarded as any person born between 1982-1997) is significantly different than in years past in seven primary ways.

1. Special

As a group, Millennials have been taught that they are special and vital to the success of their family, team and community. They have received an unprecedented amount of focus and attention from their parents and other adults, so they naturally feel that they are entitled.

2. Sheltered

Most Millennials have been protected and sheltered from birth. While this sheltering has created a generation that is much healthier and less prone to injury, it has also prevented them from experiencing, learning from, adapting to and overcoming the important and inevitable hard knocks of life. Because of this sheltering, many are crushed when they receive less than an "A" for a grade, don't get a ribbon for coming in ninth place, get cut from teams and receive any type of negative feedback. It's as if they've rarely received any criticism and subsequently don't know how to handle it.

3. Confident

According to the authors' polls, Millennials tend to be a more confident generation when it comes to their ability to achieve. However, they sometimes forget that success is not going to come instantly but instead must be worked at consistently.

4. Team-oriented

Millennials are the most interconnected generation yet. Between emailing, texting and staying connected through social networking sites, peer networks are a huge part of their daily experience. They have strong team instincts and like to stay connected with their social group.


5. Conventional

Rather than the usual rebellious teen years, Millennials tend to embrace the more traditional values of their parents. They are much less likely to use alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana than the generations before them. Howe and Strauss write, "Millennials describe closer ties with their parents than in teens in the history of postwar polling."

6. Pressured

Because of the increased competitiveness for grades, school admissions and jobs, today's Millennials are feeling much more pressure to succeed than generations before them. They believe the stakes are high and the price of mistakes is more consequential than in the

THE WINNING EDGE



TODAY'S PLAYERS
NEED a different
approach to coaching
than the athletes of
previous generations.

past. Further, many of them are overscheduled and overwhelmed from childhood with private lessons, camps and tutors all designed to help them try to get ahead of the ever-increasing global and local competition.

7. Achieving

With higher standards, Millennials are highly focused on achievement and "are on track to becoming the smartest, most-educated adults in U.S. history," according to the authors. Their test scores are continually rising and more of them are focused on going to college than ever before. They have a strong need to achieve.

Millennials & Coaching

More specifically for coaches, I do hear a lot of coaches say that today's athletes seem more fragile because they have been sheltered and protected from many of the natural disappointments of life. It also seems that many of the Millennials think that today's "instant-gratification" society also applies to athletics. They think that they can master skills in a short period of time without going through the natural and time-consuming process that it takes to learn and master a complex sport skill.

Coaches also realize that Millennials are much more influenced by their parents in comparison to past generations. Not only have young adults changed but parents have become much more involved and sometimes intrusive in their children's sports.

Finally, with today's media-obsessed society, many Millennials have extremely short-attention spans if they are not physically or mentally engaged in an activity.

Advice For Coaching Millennials

Based on the changes outlined by the authors of "Millennials Go to College" and the ones observed by coaches, here are some tips to help you coach your Millennials.

✓ **Help your Millennials understand that adversity is inevitable, temporary and helpful in the long term.** Because many Millennials don't handle failure well, you should invest the time to show them how to handle it productively. Teach your athletes how to maintain their composure and confidence — and how to refocus on to the next play.

✓ **Help your Millennials understand that getting better is a long term process.** Help your Millennials create a long term training schedule that takes them from where they are now to where they want to be. Encourage them to make the choice to stick with their plan over the long run. Remind them that success takes a long term investment of time.

✓ **Understand that there are dozens of things that compete for your Millennials' attention and time.** Don't get frustrated when your athletes are involved in a multitude of other activities. Make your sport and team one that they enjoy being a part of and see real gains when they participate. If you can do this, they will gravitate to you.

✓ **Don't lecture - Edu-tain.** Short attention spans are a hallmark of the Millennial generation because of the fast-paced world of technology. These young athletes have hundreds of television channels to choose from if they are bored, hundreds of video games, billions of websites to surf and multiple ways to instantly communicate with friends. Thus, you too have to try to build in the entertainment factor when you coach — or you quickly lose their focus. Make drills short, interesting and competitive to hold their interest.

✓ **Provide opportunities for young Millennials to engage in free athletic play.** I developed something I call Free Play Fridays. I piled a bunch of sporting equipment in the back of our mini-van and drove to a local park. We invited two dozen of my 9-year-old son's friends and acquaintances to join us for a morning of free play. They could choose whatever sports and activities they wanted to play, make up the teams and have fun on their own in a minimally supervised environment. I was there merely to keep them safe and to attend to any injuries. Despite having a low turnout because most of the children were so overscheduled, they had a chance to experience sport without the pervasive, well-meaning interference of adults for at least a few mornings.

✓ **Develop your parents into allies, not adversaries.** Because Millennials and their parents still seem in some ways to be attached at the umbilical cord, you need to find ways to include them rather than fight them. By reaching out to parents and coaching them on what is appropriate and what isn't, you have a better chance to turn them into allies than adversaries.

✓ **Help youngsters fight their own battles.** Along with the parent issue, many athletes try to have their parents fight their battles for them. Instead, encourage your athletes to constructively fight their battles on their own first. Teach them how to maturely approach conflict and how to work through it effectively. These conflict-management skills are vital for them as they have families and businesses of their own.

✓ **Remember that people are people.** Finally, even though there are differences from years past, ultimately remember that people are people. Make your practices engaging, challenge them to improve, build their confidence, support them when they struggle and you'll be sure to have a great time coaching athletes of all ages while watching them get better.

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Jeff Janssen directs Leadership Academies for the nation's top colleges including North Carolina, Michigan, Notre Dame and Pitt. He is the author of "The Team Captain's Leadership Manual," "Championship Team Building" and "The Seven Secrets Of Successful Coaches." For more information on developing leaders, team building and mental toughness, visit Jeff Janssen's websites at www.ChampionshipCoachesNetwork.com and www.JeffJanssen.com.