

High School Sports: Discussing the long term effects on young athletes



The current problems that the sport world is facing is quite troubling. There are cases of football players raping an unconscious girl, because they “didn’t think it was a bad thing” (Wetzle, 2013, 13). Schools who are accused of passing through their high profile student athletes, such as Prime Prep, who has been on extended evaluation by the NCAA (Bella, 2104). These are just two infractions that have occurred amongst a litany of others. Questions have surfaced about the culprit and often times the finger turns on the way our culture has valued athletics. Our society is very different from others around the world. This is evident in Amanda Ripley’s (2013) article *The Case Against High School Sports*. She cites examples of students from South Korea who will get recognition for academic achievements and continuously score high in areas such as math, while the first thing seen in an entry way of an American school are often times athletic trophies. While our society may hold sport to a higher level, we also perceive the value of sport to be beneficial. The American culture believes high school athletics help with life skills such as organization, communication and concentration and values such as sportsmanship and teamwork (Forneris, Camire & Trudel, 2010). Each of these examples make for a compelling argument for their respective stances. Looking at each end of the spectrum will give us a better understanding where each side comes from.

Different aspects can determine if the role of sport is a positive or negative role in the athlete’s lives. The life skills and values that Forneris et.al (2010) explained can usually be determined by who the coach is and their leadership style. “Youth coaches are critical to kids’ sports experiences. They can influence whether young athletes enjoy sports and want to continue playing. Some coaches can get kids excited about sports, while other coaches may discourage kids or take the fun out of sports. A good coach can keep kids’ interest in sports alive” (Edgar, 2012, 3). Proper coaching can bring about the desired perceived result that Forneris study looked at. While poor coaching will either hurt the athlete or will give the athlete the sense that they are above rules. Along with coaches putting pressure on the athletes, there may be a large amount of pressure coming from the parents. While some pressure may be good to build

skills that Forneris (2010) laid out, putting pressure on a young athlete like Dylan Moses experienced may not be healthy. University football teams have taken recruiting to a whole new level by giving a scholarship to a 14 year old, in Moses (Valkenburg, 2013). Getting a scholarship offer that young would seem to have no beneficial value. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) website a National Letter of Intent (LOI) can only be signed by seniors in high school. Therefore, a university has the right to pull that scholarship offer up until the LOI is signed (NCAA.org, 2014). This can be for any number of reasons, including injury, which is what happened to Mario Mathis. The student athlete from Georgia had committed to the University of Mississippi. He tore his anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and his scholarship, which he had not signed a LOI for, was pulled (Carvell, 2012). Situations like this allow for a tremendous amount of pressure to be put on a young athlete. Putting this sort of pressure to perform at a high level on a young 14 year old is detrimental to their development.

Coming from a high school background, allows for some knowledge of some areas that may help and hinder the athletes. One area was discussed in Prime Prep, which is a charter school that is able to get top athletes to go to their school (Bella, 2014). These schools are typically required to adhere to a higher standard of education in terms of grade point average (GPA) and test scores. The stigma that has attached itself to some charter schools is that the school wants to create athletes and not students (Bella, 2013). There are two Kansas City based Catholic schools, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. James Academy. Years of coaching against these teams allowed the area to see that they were pulling in students from other schools in the area that had exceptional abilities on the mat. This type of recruiting at the high school level is, once again, detrimental to the athlete and their understanding of where their attention should be spent. There could be an argument that by allowing these schools to bring in out of district students would give the student –athlete the chance to get an education they otherwise would not have.

One of the biggest arguments for sport is that it keeps kids off of drugs and out of trouble. Psychology Today, a psychological website that will post study findings, released an article in 2002 discussing the perceived “dream” that youth in sports do not partake in recreational drug use as often (Martin, 2002). The findings showed that at a young age, 13-years old, athletes were less likely, 8% to try

drugs or alcohol compared to their non-sport peers, 27%. Once these athletes reached the high school age the gap was much smaller, and in some cases the drug use and delinquency was actually higher (Martin, 2002). While this argument may have been strong in the past or even for our younger athletes, the current situation may call for a change in tactics. Sports might help the star athletes realize they want to keep clean to obtain the scholarship. The younger and less talented athletes may just be given the perfect avenue to find these drugs.

There are obviously many changes that would need to occur in order for sports to survive at the high school level. Schools such as Premont High in Texas have set the stage on what removing sports can do for a school. Jumping in passing grades from 50% to 80% of the students (Ripley, 2013). By making sports a reward and not a right, Premont has shown that academics must come first. With that being said, sports can play the positive role in a student's lives. There will need to be stricter guidelines to ensure that the students are gaining the valuable lessons from the sport and not being engineered into a sport only "student". For example, to stop universities from creating a pressure cooker for students to navigate through, the NCAA should dictate that offers can only be extended to juniors in high school. This would allow players to develop both physically and mentally. The coaching aspect has been an age old discussion that will be difficult to dissipate. Creating stricter requirements would filter out the coaches who are not qualified or may be a bad fit. While coaching, the administration never, not once, came into the mat room to check in on how practice was being conducted. This should be a weekly assessment and it should occur at random times to keep the coaches from bullying the players. Dan Wetzle (2013) discussed how the teenage culture of weak ethics, alcohol abuse and the athletes operating above the school law has opened our society's eyes to the problem at hand. While sports have been an outlet for many teens it has become a deterrent to academics and disservice in values and life skills in some cases. There may need to be a major overhaul in high school sports. Premont may have started a new trend that may need to be implemented on a large scale. Our society may need to kill high school sports in order to save them.

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