

Response Paper 1

Intro

High school athletics have long been a staple for American culture. Movies like *Friday Night Lights* have dramatized and glamorized high school football, while networks like ESPN have begun to cover a wide array of high school sports. This new national attention towards these sports has begun to raise questions as to whether our culture is putting too much emphasis on what these young men and women are doing on the playing field. Should we, as a culture, focus our attention and money on high school sports when these same 17 and 18-year-old kids are falling behind in academic scores with other Countries around the world? How do we, as future sport leaders, correctly balance out the monetary and social agenda between high school athletics and academics? To answer these questions, we must first understand the positive and detrimental effects of high school sports.

Positive Impacts of High School Sports

As a former high school athlete, it is easy to think of the numerous positive impacts that those years spent on the field have had on my former teammates and I. These positive effects include the teaching of life lessons such as sportsmanship and determination, the ability to get a college scholarship and the lure of keeping troubled youth in school. Deion Sanders' Prime Prep Academy in Dallas, even with all of its issues, is a great example of some of these encouraging influences, "Sanders and Prime Prep officials tout the high school's 100-percent graduation rate in its two years, as well as the 15 college athletic scholarships that have been awarded in that time." (Bella, 2014, para. 57) Prime Prep's officials claim that they have given hundreds of trouble teens the opportunity for athletic

advancement that will place them on college rosters. Without their coaching and the visibility Prime Prep offers, it is hard to imagine some of these athletes receiving college scholarships. Instead, some of these youth would still be on the harsh and unforgiving streets of Dallas.

A great example of Prime Prep's (and high school athletics in general) ability to help troubled youth is John Perkins. Perkins, a 300-pound offensive lineman was not only struggling inside the classroom, but also outside of it. His parents, Lisa and John, claim that attending Prime Prep and playing on the high school football team helped their son improve dramatically in academic areas as well as boosting self-confidence. "Lisa and her husband, also named John, said their son, a rising sophomore, is already doing better in school, specifically on his standardized tests. And with his academic improvement also came a noticeable turnaround in his self-confidence. "I said thank you to Deion Sanders after [our son] had been there three or four months, because he'd brought my son's smile back," said Perkins' father. "He'd brought his passion back.'" (Bella, 2014, para. 60)

However, with the positive impact that Prime Prep and high school athletics seem to be having on some athletes, there are also noticeable and glaring detriments to other young adults.

Negative Impacts of High School Sports

With the positive impacts, also come the negative when talking about the rise of high school athletics in America. The heightened focus on sports has brought with it the downfall of academic success. Prime Prep has seen eligibility issues for some of their top stars when trying to qualify at the NCAA level. "Schools that invite high-profile athletics into their program sometimes invite problems that go along with that," she said. "They sometimes bring in students from all over the country, students who are behind in academics. Sometimes, those

programs wind up struggling from an academic perspective. And sometimes, you see schools that have compromised academic priorities to provide for athletics.”” (Bella, 2014, para. 46) In fact, according to multiple reports, including by Greg Parrish of CBS Sports, Prime Prep’s courses have never been counted by the NCAA eligibility center because they are still under a strict evaluation period.

The single biggest reason for this academic failure comes because of high school officials’ willingness to spend double and triple the amount of money on football and sports in general, that they do in math and science classrooms. This was seen at Premont High School in Texas, who eventually cancelled sports because of this backward approach at financing. “Football at Premont cost about \$1,300 a player. Math, by contrast, cost just \$618 a student. For the price of one football season, the district could have hired a full-time elementary-school music teacher for an entire year.” (Ripley, 2013, para. 20) Compounding this “backward approach” is the fact that many high school teams have a higher “coach-to-player” ratio than academic classrooms have. “Many sports and other electives tend to have lower student-to-teacher ratios than math and reading classes, which drives up the cost.” (Ripley, 2013, para. 36) These types of statistics show an alarming lack of focus by our school officials as to what the real mission is of their academic institutions. “American principals, unlike the vast majority of principals around the world, make many hiring decisions with their sports teams in mind—a calculus that does not always end well for students.” (Ripley, 2013, para. 40) Saying this type of thinking is regressive, would be a gross understatement. Academics have taken a backseat, especially during football season to academics and it is hurting not just athletes, but the whole student body. The detrimental effects of this type of thinking are extremely troubling. So what must we do? Premont High School’s approach is a

good place to start. Their academic officials cancelled high school sports for a short time to turn their attention back on academics. This is not something that would or need to be done in high schools across America. However, in some of the worst academic situations, it seems to be the best option. Not only does it get the financial situation back in line (Premont now has zero debt), but it also sends a message to kids and parents that sports will no longer come ahead of improving the intellect of the student body.

Conclusion

High school sports are a part of the fabric of American Culture. Football games in Florida can now be viewed on television sets in Kansas City and vice versa. But has this gone too far? The overwhelming amount of statistics seems to say “yes”. Despite the obvious positive health impacts and life lesson teaching that come with sports, it is evident that the negatives are outweighing the positives. This starts at the top, with our school officials. The budgeting of high school sports can no longer completely overshadow how much we are spending on our kids in the classroom. America’s plummeting scores in the worldwide academic rankings can be directly attributed to this backward thinking. The small amount of athletes whom receive athletic scholarships, due this heightened focus on athletics, don’t make up for the vast majority of children that lack academic resources in the classroom. It is time that our schools focus back on their mission of educating our children, rather than turning out superstar athletes.

References

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