



DIRECTOR'S CORNER

The following is an excerpt from remarks presented at the New York State Athletic Administrators Conference and the NYSPHSAA Central Committee meeting.

This is an opportunity that I truly cherish as I am able to share my personal beliefs and philosophy pertaining to the education based athletic programs we all are responsible for.

I have always had the desire to submit an essay for National Public Radio's Show, *For This I Believe*. As you could imagine I travel a great deal and have taken a liking to NPR in my effort to stay abreast of current events and politics.

As I put thought to the focus of my remarks I crafted a list of what I considered meaningful, current and hopefully thought provoking topics.

We, together represent the collective leadership of the interscholastic athletic program in New York State. I believe that we are at the cross road of our education based athletic program. A few years ago, in a conversation with my brother, I shared with him that I thought HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS HAS TAKEN ON A FALSE SENSE OF IMPORTANCE. I never had verbalized that thought before and frankly it was frightening to me. I thought – this is terrible – I am so involved, entrenched and dedicated to high school athletics.

Look what has happened in the past year. In Nevada a student athlete faked his recruitment to a Division I powerhouse and convince his school's athletic administrator to hold a press conference highlighting his signing of a bogus letter of intent.

A wrestling coach from a member school manipulated the selection of the starting weight class by stacking the deck with 15 chips – all containing the same weight class.

Frivolous law suits have been brought forth by parents. The parents of an ice hockey player, who did not make the JV team as a junior, sued the school and the Section when their son did not make the varsity team in his senior year. Another parent sued as a result of their student being suspended from school for vulgar and threatening comments to a teacher. His father claimed that his college scholarship depended on his playing outfield and pitching for his high school baseball team.

These stories grab the headlines of local and national news. This has become nature of the beast.

This involvement, I believe, can be attributed to certain situations. First, there was the "every child gets a trophy" era. It was that revolutionary concept that began to disintegrate the concept of self assessment and work ethic amongst our youngsters. In my opinion, this led to the sense of entitlement of today's athletes and parents – everyone wants an exception – everyone wants a break. I would suggest that the hardest part of your positions is dealing with the parents in your community. I hear from parents through email and phone calls. I credit the "question authority generation" for our current parental problems. But look around – most of the parents are part of our generation – we just so happen to be the authority they are questioning.

But I suggest there is hope. Interscholastic athletics is WORTH fighting for. Simply put, TODAY's kids deserve the opportunity to participate in our interscholastic athletic program.

So how can we preserve what we love about interscholastic athletics? How do we protect the

outside influences from eroding the essential core of our programs? I believe there are three strategies to address this issue; passion, courage and identity.

The first answer is our collective passion for athletics. For over ten years, I have shared my personal philosophy regarding our influence over the interscholastic athletic program. I call it PASSION VS POWER. I do not believe power gets anything done. Power is an ego based concept. Power is pushy. Power is not productive. On the other hand there is PASSION. Passion is real. Passion is emotional. Passion motivates and inspires. Passion allows us to commit and dedicate. Passion is thoughtful and insightful. Passion creates influence and it is that influence that creates change.

We are compelled to provide for APPROPRIATE CHANGE in interscholastic athletics. In the summer of 2006 I shared some of following remarks at the Central Committee meeting and they are still meaningful today. We need to have the courage to change. Not simply change for the sake of change, but for the betterment of our interscholastic athletic programs in our high and middle schools. Today's student athletes and athletic programs are so very different from 20 years ago. We have to acknowledge their importance yet restrict ourselves when we are tempted to encourage that false sense of importance.

We have been blessed with the responsibility of administering high school athletics and consequently it is our duty to provide the absolute very best education based opportunity for our student athletes.

During the last few years we had the courage to move forward and not remain complacent. We had the insight to evaluate our practices and policies by seeking opportunities for improvement. We had the courage to step out of our comfort zone to make improvements in our programs and championship events. We had the courage to change when the change enhanced competition while making opportunities more equitable. We had the courage to change, to further the mission of high school athletics.

The last remaining strategy to protect our programs lies within all of us. We need to articulate the notion that interscholastic athletics are different. We need to stand up for what we believe in while focusing on our identity.

I have the privilege of attending numerous National Federation of High School Associations meetings throughout the year.

At two meetings – one for the NFHS Strategic Plan, the other for the NFHS Executive Directors Professional Development workshop – I was fortunate to listen to Dr. Rich Luker speak. He addressed the current issues of high school athletics across our nation. He stressed that we need to "market" our programs to our target audience, our audience of community. The conversation he had with us was a mixture of a visionary approach sprinkled with a business concept.

But he said four little words that were the most meaningful to me. I immediately decided that these four words were going to be the focus of my remarks today. WE ARE HIGH SCHOOL.

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WE ARE HIGH SCHOOL We are about school community, not all star teams. We are about healthy local rivalries, not national championships. We teach citizenship, competency, civility and commitment. WE ARE HIGH SCHOOL. We establish effective Codes of Conduct. We hold athletes and coaches accountable for THEIR actions and behavior. We focus on the values of sportsmanship.

WE ARE HIGH SCHOOL We strike the balance between academics and athletics.

We care for the safety of student athletes. Last spring I received an email from a wrestling coach. He wrote with his concern over the increase in participation in club sports during the high school season. He cited that his team members and those at nearby schools participate in practice 6 days a week and then head off to club practices on two of those evenings and Sundays. He struggles in his attempt to educate parents on the need for rest and recovery, but his comments fall on deaf ears because the parents feel they are doing what is right for their child. Another coach shared that in his practices he works to develop not only skills but stresses the importance of respect, loyalty and good sportsmanship. He reluctantly suggested these important values are being compromised by some clubs.

WE ARE HIGH SCHOOL We teach and model integrity. We console, we mentor, we parent. Unfortunately

the trend for parents today is to peer and not parent.

WE ARE HIGH SCHOOL We set standards of fairness. We teach diversity. We encourage the acceptance of the weaknesses in others while training students to maximize their strengths and the strengths of others so that a common goal can be achieved.

We are about memories. Think about your own high school athletic experiences.

I must admit that I rarely attend regular season contests. In early February, a friend invited me to watch her 7th grade daughter play in a Modified Basketball Game at Red Hook High School, the district in which I reside. It was the last home game of the season and all the spectators were given a small game program. This special touch – a memory was created. WE ARE HIGH SCHOOL

We need to ensure that all stakeholders understand the concept of: WE ARE HIGH SCHOOL. We are the last remaining pure aspect of sport. Let's share this notion at every opportunity we have.

As we begin the 2008-2009 school year let us work together to protect and enhance the notion of WE ARE HIGH SCHOOL so future generations may reap the benefits of the programs that we respect and love so dearly.

