

The Purpose of High School Athletics

In last Sunday's World Herald there was an interesting article titled "Is the NSAA keeping your kid from earning a scholarship?" The article examines the possible effects of Legislative Bill 1135, which attempts to abolish a few NSAA rules and allow for more participation in club programs by high school students. Currently, the NSAA (Nebraska School Activities Association) has a number of rules that attempt to regulate students' participation in high school activities. Without going into all the details, LB 1135 would greatly expand the opportunities for high school students when it comes to training and participating in athletic events. It would limit the powers of the NSAA in regulating students in high school programs and promote more participation in club sports.

The first time I read this article I was completely opposed to this bill. After reading the article again, and reading peoples' reaction from a couple open forums on the Internet, I see a little of the other point of view, but I still believe that LB 1135 would not be good for the vast majority of high school athletes. I believe the argument comes down to the purpose of high school athletics. Some proponents of this bill seem to believe that the role of high school athletics is to give students the opportunity to gain an athletic scholarship in college. Below are some statistics that show the small number of high school students that earn a scholarship at any Division 1 or 2 college in a few different sports. Howells (as an example) has had a tremendous amount of success in a number of different sports, and yet we still don't have very many of our athletes go on to earn scholarships at Division 1 or 2 schools.

If this bill, or anything similar, would pass it probably would not greatly help any of our students, since we are not real close to the large cities where club sports are becoming extremely popular and, also, we do not offer many of the sports where club programs have become so popular (swimming, baseball, tennis, etc.). However, there are a number of other reasons why I am against this kind of legislation. This legislation would probably help a very small percentage of the athletes in our state, while the vast majority would eventually be hurt. The purpose of the NSAA and high school athletics is not to earn students a scholarship at the next level, it is to teach the concepts of teamwork, sacrifice, hard work, commitment, sportsmanship, and many other virtues to enhance students for the rest of their lives. I'm sure that there are elite coaches of club teams out there who could really help a few athletes, but what about the rest of these students that can't afford, live too far away from, or just aren't "elite" enough for these club programs? In nearly every other country in the world, sports are not a part of the school system. Kids who want to participate in sports do this through club programs that are expensive and designed for elite athletes. Most kids in other countries never experience the camaraderie of playing for a high school team, in anything. Look at how some of our recent foreign exchange students enjoy just having the opportunity to participate on a high school team. I'm afraid this type of legislation could eventually lead to the end of some high school sports in Nebraska.

How about message confusion? Imagine the pressure put on a high school student to satisfy two teams at once, two coaches at once? What happens when the high school coach teaches one technique and the club coach teaches another — during the same week or on the same night? Who does the kid listen to? These are points brought up by UNO wrestling coach, Mike Denney and UNL volleyball coach, John Cook, who are both against the bill. Finally, one of the biggest reasons I oppose this bill is because of the avenue the proponents have taken—through the Nebraska Legislature. Do we really want our state legislature to control high school athletics now? The NSAA has been called a good old boy network, and a lot worse, by many who do not even know what it is. The NSAA is an organization made up of every school in Nebraska, each with a voice and the chance to propose or eliminate rules and regulations. While I do not always agree with all the regulations of the NSAA, and I do believe some changes could be made, it is a democratic process. If there is a proposal that most schools agree on, it will eventually be passed, if not, that's the democratic process we live with. Obviously, the majority of the schools in Nebraska are against this legislation and that is why proposals similar to this that have come through the NSAA have

not had enough support to pass. I hope our senators decide to stay out of high school athletics and I also hope people re-examine the role of high school sports and put them into the proper perspective. They are a great extension of the educational system, not just a path to earn students college scholarships.

Estimated Probability of Competing in Athletics Beyond the High School Level:

Football	5.7%	Men's Basketball	3.0%
Women's Basketball	3.3%	Baseball	6.1%
Men's Soccer	5.5%		

The chances of an athlete eventually playing professionally in that sport:

Football	.08%	Men's Basketball	.03%
Women's Basketball	.02%	Baseball	.45%
Men's Soccer	.07%		