

January 2024



We've Got Spirit How 'Bout You?

**Lessons from the Pandemic: The
Aftermath of the COVID-19 Era**

**Schools Must Continue to Invest
in Education-based Athletics and
Activities**

**Link to [elisportsnetwork](#) article about
national awards winners**



**Joe Keller, NIAAA Bruce Whitehead Distinguished Service Award Recipient
Jeff Lowell, NFHS Citation Award Recipient**



Danger Alligator Snakes

SERVICE THROUGH EDUCATION-BASED ATHLETICS



Washington State Secondary Athletic Administrators Association

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WE'VE GOT SPIRIT HOW 'BOUT YOU?

Bob Kickner, C.A.A
Kelso High School



During my senior season at Churchill HS my teammates and I returned to the court after a timeout and were met with a raucous rendition of “We’ve got spirit yes We do, We’ve got spirit how about you!” The students, band members, cheerleaders, parents

and fans all in unison chanting and pointing across the court to the opposing section. The powerful energy being matched by the thundering reply from the visiting voices of our rivals from South Eugene HS.

In that moment, as a player I was uplifted by the energy of the crowd enhancing the moment of my competitive experience. Back and forth it went, neither group wanting to give up or get quieter. It wasn’t until our student section broke off and repeated “we’ve got more, look at the score,” that I realized the audience believed they were making a difference in the outcome of the contest.

It has long been the desire of spectators to take ownership of their favorite team’s performance. Without picking up a weight, doing a drill, or scoring a single point, fans believe they can have an effect on the scoreboard by becoming the “Home Court Advantage.” Years of unchecked “one-upmanship” has led the emotional investment of sports crowds in educational based athletics down a path that has impacted the integrity of amateur sports.

In 2023, crowd behavior has disintegrated to the point where security officers are required, school administration monitors student sections with a high level of scrutiny, and referees are harassed and attacked.

Social acceptance of comical, oftentime belligerent crowd behavior at professional and collegiate levels have altered the expectation of educational based athletic spectators. Profanity, racial slurs, body shaming, direct statements at players and coaches all in effort to “get in the heads” of an opponent

to make an impact on the scoreboard has become commonplace.

Challenging fans (and parents) bring inflated expectations of team success based on their investment in money, time and energy. When their child’s performance is unsuccessful they often feel entitled to say whatever they want, and behave however they feel in order to place blame on anything not directed at their child. The opportunity to challenge coaching decisions and publicly admonish referees disrupts the contest and creates a negative atmosphere.

School administrators are now attempting to climb the mountain of negative crowd conduct. The South Puget Sound League held a sportsmanship summit inviting 8-10 influential students from ten schools to discuss crowd behaviors from a variety of invested perspectives. Coaches, players, principals, parents, referees, athletic directors and a superintendent all spoke to the common question of what proper conduct should be at sporting events. The goal was to bring light to the problem and seek ways to return the playing atmosphere to a more respectful, safe and fun environment.

Athletic Directors need to hold the line on creating a welcoming and respectful sports atmosphere for both the home and visiting participants without pandering into the realm of entertainment. A difficult task when residents aspire to be like the Seattle Seahawks 12th man. An energy espoused in Washington as the gold standard of sports behavior. Unfortunately, that level of energy is fueled by a sense of anonymity in a 60,000 seat stadium, national media attention, and nine dollar alcoholic beverages . None of which can be cultivated in public schools.

It is clear that crowd expectations have become blurred. Entertainment values have skewed the educational mission of high school athletics. Gone are cheerleaders whose primary responsibility is to create a positive and engaged student section. Simple, neutral cheers such as “De-Fence” or “Go, Team, Go” have been replaced by student chant leaders who increase the tension by churning up the students with

the “You can’t do that”, or “But-ter Fingers”, and sadly are met with supportive giggles from the adults in the bleachers.

Times have changed. Society has become willing to challenge everything. Traditions, cheers, and actions that have been allowed forever are now being scrutinized as unsporting. Other groups have become overly sensitive to critique and are willing to share their disappointment with school boards, administrators, and superintendents. Athletic directors are being held responsible for having an action plan to address negative contest environments.

During 2023-24, take the time to consider all the individual elements that contribute to your game experience. Stakeholders such as the public address announcer, band, cheer, coaches, players, leadership students, administrators, referees, sub-varsity teams in the stands, parents, youth athletes, boosters, and alumni. Each group needs to be reminded of the gift they have to witness high school athletics and their contributions to the overall atmosphere of the event. Educational based athletics does not center itself on entertainment value but needs to remain focused on the lessons that come as an extension of the classroom.

Entering his 32nd year in athletic administration, Kickner has worked in college and high school settings as a coach, athletic director, sports information director, and intramural organizer.. A WOA certified official in soccer and basketball, Kickner received his Masters Degree in Health, Physical Education and Recreation from Emporia State University (KS). He is currently on the leadership team for the Kelso School District serving the sports youth and families in Kelso, WA.



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Loren Sandhop, CAA
Athletic Director
Moses Lake School District
WSSAAA President 2023-24

I hope your fall has gotten off to a smooth start with daily victories under your belt, and the look ahead is promising for both post season and winter activities. When I talk about victories, I mean the daily positive interactions you have with your coaches, student-athletes, their parents, and the people who surround you in your effort to promote education based athletics. Those surrounding people are important to your success and I'm talking about your administration, the secretaries, custodians, game officials, and game management personnel like announcers, clock workers, ticket takers, chain crews, volleyball lines, etc.

In my eyes, we as athletic administrators connect kids, families, teachers, and coaches to our school. WIAA Executive Director Mick Hoffman challenged us on WIAA Wednesday just a week or so ago to thank people this month of October for their contributions to our program. What ideas have you started to put into action? Have you hand written a thank you note? Maybe you've gone out of your way bring a coffee to a co-worker? How about some team gear like a hat or polo to let them know they are part of your team? Maybe it's an ice-cold water or a snack to get them through halftime, or better yet greeted them by name at the game and created a special shout-out to introduce and recognize them on the public address so people clap for them? Or maybe you call a colleague AD just to vent and dialogue through a tough situation. Before you finish the conversation, compliment your friend for sharing their time, experience, and willingness to mentor you.

I reiterate all of these ways that we show gratitude for several reasons. They help to strengthen relationships, build trust, and to ultimately help us emulate for our constituents the role models we need to be. Our kids, coaches, and colleagues need to see us be grateful and in return, we will be leading by our own actions. We need more people in our communities who are respectful and appreciative for things we have versus the complaining about things we don't or that are not the way we'd do something. So, in this regard, we will be helping sow our seeds. And don't underestimate the power of a thank you or positive affirmation coming back to you tenfold when the crop is harvested.



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HIGH SCHOOL FLAG FOOTBALL: A NEW SPORT FOR GIRLS

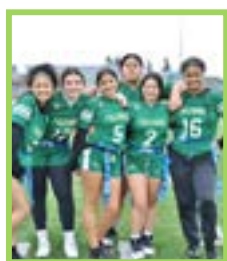
James Neil



High school girls' flag football is rapidly gaining momentum across the United States and it's time for Washington State to consider adding this exciting sport to their high school varsity sport roster. Girls flag football is sanctioned by eight (8) state associations across the United States and is one of the fastest growing youth

sports with nearly 500,000 female athletes between the ages of 6-17 playing the sport last year. This represented an impressive 63% increase from 2019. In Washington State, youth flag football is also growing at a tremendous rate and our goal is to provide opportunities for athletes interested in flag football to compete at the varsity level.

During the Spring of 2021, Tacoma Public Schools and Franklin Pierce Schools, with the support of the Seattle Seahawks, instituted a high school girls flag football league. In our schools flag football has become a powerful tool for promoting inclusivity, providing new opportunities for female athletes, and fostering teamwork. In this article, we'll explore the benefits of introducing girls' flag football in Washington State high schools and the positive impact it can have on both the athletes and their communities.



The Sport of Flag Football

Flag football is its own unique sport, with its own unique skill sets and strategy. With differing field size, strategy and rules, the game is faster, safer and just as exciting as tackle football. As a result, athletes learn to communicate effectively, strategize, and work together to achieve common goals. Coaching flag football requires a high level of attention specific

to the execution of proper technique via repetitive drills, in-game routes, and defensive skills, while strengthening an individual's work ethic and ability to focus in dynamic situations. Flag football is a very social and team-focused game, with every position having a set purpose that requires working in harmony to fulfill individual responsibilities. With the removal of tackling, there is no need for heavy equipment making flag football less expensive to run on the whole when compared to other sports, lowering barriers to participation. Athletes learn to communicate effectively, strategize, and work together to achieve common goals. These skills are not only beneficial in the context of sports but also in academics, future careers, and life in general.

Inclusivity and Gender Equity

One of the most significant advantages of incorporating girls' flag football into high school sports programs is its potential to promote inclusivity and gender equity. Many of our own female athletes have been eager to prove themselves on the football field but not given the space to do so in traditional tackle football. The comradery and competitiveness displayed by our flag football athletes has grown tremendously. The increases in participation we have experienced sends a powerful message about breaking down gender stereotypes and providing equal opportunities for all students. This implementation has created a more diverse and equitable sports culture within our schools and the broader community, by opening doors for female athletes to shine in a competitive environment. We are proud to provide a level playing field where girls can develop their athleticism, leadership, and teamwork, helping them grow both on and off the field.

Building School Spirit and Community

Adding girls' flag football to the high school sports repertoire fosters a sense of school spirit and community pride. The games bring students, parents, and the community together to support their athletes. The shared excitement and camaraderie can create a positive atmosphere that extends far beyond the sports field.

Getting Started

To introduce girls' flag football to your high school, consider the following steps:

• **Assess Interest:** Start by gauging the interest of female students and potential coaches.

• **Outreach:** Promote the sport to students and their families, encouraging participation.

• **Establish a Team:** Form a committee, including coaches, school administrators, and parents to plan, budget and organize the program.

- o Standard varsity roster size is 12-17 players.
- o Field size is 35 yards wide and 54 yards long (Played sideline to sideline in a full-sized football field)

• **Secure Resources:** Ensure you have funding to obtain the necessary equipment, field space, and coaching staff. The Seattle Seahawks have provided an annual grant to provide start up fees.

- o Uniforms
- o Flags (flags that “pop” when pulled are best)
- o Footballs (youth sized football)
- o Cones

• **Inclusive Approach:** Emphasize that the sport is open to all skill levels, welcoming newcomers and experienced athletes alike.

WIAA Amendment

The experience of Tacoma, Franklin Pierce and Seattle Public Schools has led the charge to submit an amendment to the WIAA to make Girls Flag Football an official WIAA sport. While these districts offer the sport during the winter, we also recognize this might not be feasible for every community, which is why the amendment was submitted with multiple “alternate season” conditions allowing a league or district to place the sport in any season, with the state championships occurring in the Spring. We hope athletic directors around the state will find a benefit in adding girls flag football to the menu of options available, when they need to make decisions related to Title IX. If you have any questions regarding the amendment, please contact:

Conclusion

Girls’ flag football offers numerous benefits to high school athletes, schools, and communities. By introducing this sport, you can contribute to gender equity, promote inclusivity, and provide female athletes with an exciting new opportunity.

Additionally, it fosters valuable life skills, encourages a healthy lifestyle, and builds a strong sense of school spirit. I hope you will see the positive impact that girls’ flag football can bring to your school and the lives your student athletes. Together, let’s empower the next generation of female athletes and inspire a brighter future for our communities.

James Neil’s journey from an elementary Physical Education teacher to the District Athletic Director for Tacoma Public Schools is truly inspiring. His commitment to fostering a culture of athleticism and teamwork within educational institutions highlights his passion for holistic student development.

Starting at the grassroots level as a PE teacher in the Fife School District, James made a significant impact by instilling a love for fitness and sports in young minds. The creation of a unicycle team and coaching at the middle school level showcased his innovative approach to promoting physical activity and teamwork.

His transition to the role of an elementary school principal further emphasized his dedication to the overall well-being of students. James’ personal experience as a track and field athlete at Central Washington University adds a valuable perspective to his role as the current District Athletic Director for Tacoma Public Schools. He understands firsthand the transformative power of sports in shaping character and fostering a strong work ethic.

In this current leadership role, James advocates for the significance of physical fitness in the overall development of students. His commitment to creating a positive and inclusive athletic community within the district reflects his belief that every student should have the opportunity to explore their potential in sports.

James Neil’s career path exemplifies a commitment to creating a well-rounded educational experience for every student in Tacoma Public Schools.

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DON'T LET NEGATIVITY INFECT YOU, SURVIVING THE EPIDEMIC: HOW ATHLETIC LEADERS CAN MANAGE CRITICISM

By Aaron Stecker C.M.A.A.
Scott Garvis C.M.A.A.



The role of an athletic director is a multifaceted and complex role, requiring a balance of leadership, communication, and decision-making skills. As leaders, athletic directors are responsible for setting the tone for their programs, guiding coaches, and creating a positive culture for their athletes. However, with this responsibility comes the potential for negativity and criticism from coaches, parents, and other stakeholders, which can take a toll on an athletic director's health and mental wellness. This article explores how athletic directors can manage their emotions and maintain their mental health and wellness when dealing with difficult stakeholders.

“EDUCATION IS THE ABILITY TO LISTEN TO ALMOST ANYTHING WITHOUT LOSING YOUR TEMPER OR YOUR SELF-CONFIDENCE.” –ROBERT FROST

As athletic administrators, it's easy to let the opinions of others get under our skin. Whether it's a disgruntled coach, an upset parent, or a critical community member, negative feedback can affect our mood and mental health and wellness. But as leaders, it's important to recognize the danger in allowing this negativity to fester. When we allow negative feedback to get under our skin, it's like a wound that gets infected. The longer we let it fester, the harder it is to get rid of the infection. It can lead to bitterness, resentment, and burnout. As athletic directors, we need to find ways to protect ourselves from this kind of negativity. One of the most important things we can do is to cultivate a positive attitude. When we focus on the positive aspects of our work, it's harder for negative feedback to bring us down. We need to remind ourselves of the good we're doing, the successes we've had, and the impact we're making on the lives of our athletes. Another key strategy is to surround ourselves with positive people. We need colleagues and friends

who will support us, encourage us, and remind us of our strengths. When we're feeling down, these people can lift us up and help us regain our perspective.

Finally, we need to learn to let go of negative feedback. It's important to listen to feedback and take it seriously, but we can't let it consume us. We need to recognize that not everyone will agree with our decisions or be happy with the work we're doing. We need to stay true to our values and our mission, even when it's hard. Being an athletic director is a challenging and rewarding job. It requires leadership, resilience, and a commitment to excellence. But it also requires us to take care of ourselves and our mental wellness. By cultivating a positive attitude, surrounding ourselves with supportive people, and learning to let go of negativity, we can be effective leaders who make a positive impact on our schools, our athletes, and our communities.

THE DANGER OF NEGATIVITY

As athletic directors, we are often tasked with making decisions that are not popular with everyone. We may have to cut programs, deny requests for new equipment, or make coaching changes that upset parents and coaches. These decisions can lead to negative feedback and criticism, which can take a toll on our mental wellness if we allow it to fester. That negativity can become like that sliver you just cannot get out from under your skin. It starts out as no big deal but over time becomes infected and painful and requires all of your attention to address it. Internalizing negative feedback and not managing it becomes the same thing and eventually it requires all of your energy, all of your time, and can hurt relationships in the long run.

“YOU MAY ENCOUNTER MANY DEFEATS, BUT YOU MUST NOT BE DEFEATED. IN FACT, IT MAY BE NECESSARY TO ENCOUNTER THE DEFEATS, SO YOU CAN KNOW WHO YOU ARE, WHAT YOU CAN RISE FROM, HOW YOU CAN STILL COME OUT OF IT.” – MAYA ANGELOU

CULTIVATE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

One of the most important things we can do is to cultivate a positive attitude. When we focus on the positive aspects of our

work, it's harder for negative feedback to bring us down. We need to remind ourselves of the good we're doing, the successes we've had, and the impact we're making on the lives of our athletes. Get down to the gym or out to the practice field and watch your coaches and athletes doing what they do best and see the joy it brings them. Remember that this is why you do what you do.

To cultivate a positive attitude, we can start by focusing on our strengths. We can identify what we're good at, what we enjoy doing, and what brings us satisfaction. When we're clear on our strengths, we can use them to guide our decision-making and create a sense of purpose in our work.



Aaron Stecker has been an educator for 27 years, the past 22 years at Kennedy High School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He has taught and coached most of his career in the state of Iowa, but he did spend three years in the St. Louis area prior to landing at Kennedy.

We can also focus on the positive aspects of our program. We can celebrate successes, highlight accomplishments, and share positive stories with our coaches, athletes, and parents. By focusing on the good, we create a culture of positivity that can help protect us from negativity. The negative people around your programs are going to tell version of the story. Be sure to share all of the great things your athletes and coaches are up to and make certain that version is equally well known and well celebrated in your school and community.

“BE MINDFUL. BE GRATEFUL. BE POSITIVE. BE KIND. BE YOU.” – AARON STECKER



Scott Garvis holds a master's degree in educational leadership from Drake University & master's degree in sports management, and is certified by the National Interscholastic Athletic Association as a certified master athletic administrator. He has been recognized

by the National High School Athletic Coaches Association as an “National Athletic Director of the Year Finalist” and was recognized by the National Interscholastic Administrators Association with the Bruce Whitehead Distinguished Service Award. As a leader in the sports industry Garvis has presented to athletic administrators across the country and his ideas on athletic leadership have been published in numerous professional journals.

LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC: THE AFTERMATH OF THE COVID-19 ERA

Gary Stevens, Athletic Administrator
Thornton Academy – Saco, Maine



There has never been a period in United States history that parallels that of the coronavirus pandemic. From March, 2020 to approximately two years later, the quality of life in America was adversely impacted by the nation's response to the invisible virus. The era was marked by masking mandates, an emphasis on social distancing, business

closures, and a cultural divide that persists to this day. Years from now, Americans will see this epoch as a dividing line between life as they knew it and a “new normal” that could not have been predicted.

The impact of COVID-19 was particularly pronounced in the country's high schools. During the first few months of the pandemic, school systems throughout the United States shifted to virtual learning to minimize close contacts with positive cases and avoid a possible superspreading event. Even when many school units returned to in-person instruction in the fall of 2020, students found themselves in classrooms marked by floor tape and divided by protective shields. A positive case within a classroom setting could result in an entire group of students being quarantined for one to two weeks. It was a paradigm that was frustrating to students, parents, classroom teachers, school nurses, and administrators.

Leaders working in educational athletics found themselves on the front lines of managing local, state, and federal guidelines for responding to the pandemic. With few exceptions, interscholastic athletics were shut down totally in the spring of 2020. Even when play resumed during the fall, the norms of competition barely resembled that which had taken place a year before. Players donned masks while participating and, in some states, before empty grandstands. Signage related to COVID-19, screening mechanisms, and gallon containers of sanitizing handwash were part of this backdrop.

The nation's “COVID generation” of high school athletic directors performed their jobs well in the face of these unprecedented circumstances. (During the “Spanish Flu” pandemic of 1918, athletic competition largely continued in an uninterrupted way.). They persevered amid public scrutiny and criticism and found pathways for their students to return to competition. They discovered best practices from other school systems and adopted them as their own. As guidelines changed – sometimes in the middle of a workday – they

found a way to make necessary adjustments.

The pandemic was a source of widespread frustration, angst, and anger. It was a period in our American story that seemed would never end. The relief in the country was palpable when mask mandates were lifted, schools and businesses were fully reopened, and the necessity to do daily screenings for COVID-19 symptoms was shelved.

However, at the same time, the pandemic had some illuminating moments as well. The COVID-19 experience was fraught with lessons, particularly for those leading education-based athletic programs. Mike Wisecup, the one-time Navy SEAL who currently serves as the director of athletics at Colby College in Waterville, Maine, argues that COVID was one of the greatest teachers that people of this generation have encountered. It forced athletics leaders to closely examine their traditional practices and make alterations based upon the current landscape.

There were many lessons to be learned from our COVID experience. What follows is a summary of several of the key messages that were part of a most unorthodox “curriculum”. When appropriate, potential applications of those tools are identified and explained.

Lesson One: The COVID-19 experience proved, beyond a doubt, the value of athletics in the student experience.

University of Wisconsin researcher Timothy McGuine may have been unknown to all but a few athletic directors in the country prior to December, 2020, but the longtime Badger State athletic trainer soon gained an eager audience hinging on his every word. At the virtual national conference conducted by the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association in that year, McGuine was a featured speaker on student-athlete mental health. A few months into the pandemic, McGuine conducted a survey that eventually attracted people beyond his home state. The results confirmed what many in education-based athletics had hypothesized: the loss of athletic opportunities in the spring and fall of 2020 had significantly impacted them not only physically, but also socially and psychologically.

The social implications upon the loss of school sports during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic was significant. In many states where COVID-19 restrictions were more stringent, the curtailment of school-based sports did not deter some people from discovering activities elsewhere. Some families traveled beyond state lines to find opportunities for competition. Others defied guidance

related to gathering limits and limitations placed upon community sports to create leagues – both formal and informal – for their children.

In other cases, students and parents worked together to create political pressure upon lawmakers to reverse course. In Maine, a group of concerned student-athletes and their families formed an alliance known as “Let Them Play”. The “Let Them Play” advocates conducted a series of public rallies in the front of the governor’s residence and the state capitol building during August, 2020 while state agencies debated about a timetable for the return of school sports. This political action group became a powerful voice for many who had a simple message for their leaders: school-based extra-curricular activities are important and essential for the well-being of students.

Lesson Two: The pandemic exposed the importance of hygienic practices.

One of the caveats of life in the COVID-19 pandemic was the necessity to keep one’s hands clean, thus lowering the risk of acquiring the coronavirus. Athletic directors and coaches in the COVID era went to the extreme of cleaning athletic equipment, such as game balls or other implements, during competition. Schools and businesses acquired gallons of hand sanitizer and set up stations for patrons and visitors. Nearly four years after Americans first heard the term “COVID”, the practice continues to be widespread.

The emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene reinforced an important lesson for education-based athletics personnel: reducing the risk of germ spread is a sound practice in general. Attending to personal hygiene and cleanliness through routines such as laundering apparel, frequent handwashing, and not sharing water bottles goes far beyond protection against the coronavirus. In the petri dish of microbes known as the American school, it reduces the risk of spread of several diseases that can compromise the short-term health of students and staff.

Lesson Three: Communication with parents and community stakeholders is essential for an interscholastic program to thrive.

Athletic directors who served schools between 2020 and 2022 will attest to the fact that they wrote a lot more e-mails than usual – many of them regarding the changing guidelines related to COVID-19 that impacted their athletic programs. Given that today’s newsflash could soon become fodder for the trash bin, it was essential to communicate regularly, systematically, and accurately to feed news to a frustrated public. I vividly recall my weekly routine of sending a missive to all parents of athletes in which I outlined –sport by sport – the update

for the upcoming week. Ensuring that parents connected with various sport activities understood all the parameters for competition in each of venues we accessed. – fans or no fans, vaccination card required or not, access to locker rooms, the availability of livestreaming – was part of my weekly norm.

Those athletics leaders working in that era conducted those practices out of necessity to reduce confusion, avoid angry parents, and keep the number of e-mail complaints to a minimum. An important takeaway from that experience is that good communication is important under any circumstances. Many athletic directors have emerged from the pandemic by continuing the practice of weekly e-mails or newsletters to keep their families informed.

Lesson Four: Accurate record keeping is a nonnegotiable component of athletics leadership.

Athletic directors working under COVID conditions were required to keep accurate records to ensure that safety of their student-athletes, coaches, and spectators. Keeping attendance at practice (for potential contact tracing purposes) and screening student-athletes for symptoms of the virus were routinely conducted in the early months as students resumed activity. Later, as companies such as Pfizer and Moderna developed vaccines for the contagion, keeping track of vaccinated and non-vaccinated players, coaches, and spectators was essential for managing throughput into many facilities.

Keeping accurate records – although not a specific outcome of athletic director life during the pandemic – never had more potentially significant consequences. Athletic administrators are responsible for maintaining stores of records related to their programs. Their COVID experiences were strong reminders that there is no replacement for accuracy and meticulousness; the habits required (and sometimes acquired) during the pandemic apply in many areas of the job.

Lesson Five: There is a place for empathetic leadership, even within the competitive environment of athletics.

When schools held their first interschool competitions in the fall of 2020 and the winter of 2021, athletic directors noticed a marked change in how they were conducted. Beyond the socially distanced benches, vats of hand sanitizer, and presence of face coverings, something was different. Teams competed hard to win, but seemed to do it under more friendly circumstances. Their shared experiences of isolation and loss due to COVID had brought out a greater appreciation for the games themselves. Coaches showed empathy for their players, their opponents, and the game officials.

Unfortunately, behaviors in crowds tended to grow more negative once the masks were thrown away and people sensed that the threat of the

coronavirus was largely in retreat. However, the atmosphere at the earliest COVID competitions should not be forgotten. It is possible for competition and civility to co-exist, even in the athletic arena. It begins with empathetic leadership from coaches, athletic directors, school officials – and parents – with an eye on exercising common decency towards others.

Lesson Six: Virtual learning has some positive implications for the future of communications within high school athletics.

As schools closed to in-person learning during the spring of 2020, many of them began to use virtual platforms, such as Google, Zoom, and Brightspace, to conduct instruction. Within hours of the closure announcements, teachers were familiarizing themselves with the nuances of using these tools. Even athletic coaches used on-line processes for holding team meetings while in-person play was on hold. Long after schools fully re-opened, these platforms are used to conduct classes on storm days or other dates in the school calendar where it is not possible to open buildings

Communication within the athletic realm has similarly been transformed. Many athletic directors adopted the use of Zoom or related platforms for a variety of purposes. Some hold coaches meetings or parent information nights virtually. Others have leveraged the recording feature of these platforms to develop informational content for families and reviews of major state association policies for coaches education.

Lesson Seven: Cashless transactions are the way of the future.

As athletic spectators returned to school campuses in the fall of 2020, many athletic administrators became concerned about money as a possible means of transmitting the coronavirus. At the same time, many ticketing companies throughout the United States emerged to sell new electronic products to help ease throughput into athletic events and assign seating. It was no longer necessary to bring cash to athletic events; one could buy access to games through one's phone, laptop, or another device.

Cashless transactions are now part of the “new normal” of school athletics, even at booster-operated concession stands. Many schools and state athletic organizations are shifting away from cash as a mode of conducting business. Schools that are currently relying totally on a traditional model of ticketing will soon find themselves in the minority.

Lesson Eight: A school's athletic brand can be promoted through live streaming of contests.

In addition to on-line ticketing, the growth of live streaming as a

means of transmitting high school games to an eager audience has been an outcome of COVID-19. Whereas it was a necessity in those states that had indoor or outdoor gathering limits in 2020 and 2021, it has become an accepted – and, in some cases, expected – part of the athletics operation. Many schools utilize the NFHS Network and its donated cache of equipment for delivering content to interested fans. Others rely on media such as Facebook or YouTube to transmit their brand to homes throughout the world.

Perhaps the most important lesson that athletics leaders can take from the COVID era is that we can never take school sports for granted again. As calendar pages turned from February to March in 2020, Americans could never have imagined what was in store for them within two weeks. The loss of those opportunities, as the McGuire study at the University of Wisconsin identified, had profound consequences upon students which echo to this day.

The fact that people wanting sports for their students were willing to go to any extreme illustrates that high school athletics leaders must go to equal lengths to protect the integrity of their programs and make them attractive to potential participants. Those who work in this area know that there is no real substitute than wearing the colors of one's school with its name emblazoned across the front. Coaches should strive to teach their players an appreciation of what they have; COVID demonstrated that tomorrow is not guaranteed.

Gary Stevens, CMAA, is the athletic director of Thornton Academy in Saco, Maine. He can be reached at gary.stevens@thorntonacademy.org

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Link to elisportsnetwork article for Joe Keller, NIAAA Bruce Whitehead Distinguished Service Award and Jeff Lowell, NFHS Citation Award

Link to story: <https://www.elisportsnetwork.com/2023/12/26/washington-ads-recognized-at-national-conference/>

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SCHOOLS MUST CONTINUE TO INVEST IN EDUCATION-BASED ATHLETICS AND ACTIVITIES

Mick Hoffman,
WIAA Executive Director



As school superintendents and school directors face difficult financial challenges this spring, we must continue to educate and advocate regarding the value of their investment in education-based athletics and activities. Many are surprised when they learn that the annual investment for a school district is just 2% on average of their annual budget. There are very few investments in education that have the proven return on

investment and far reaching impact of education-based athletics and activities.

There is no doubt that education leaders must scrutinize how their discretionary spending is allocated. It is imperative that individuals who lead athletic and activity programs are well versed in the positive impact their efforts have on all students in the school, so we can properly advocate for full funding. A majority of students in schools choose to participate and all students have the opportunity to participate. Participation is not only wearing the uniforms and performing on stage, but students create marketing materials, produce streaming for viewers and provide a multitude of other support services which are directly related to their educational journey. The ultimate goal of education-based athletics and activities is to keep students connected to their educational opportunities and no one can do it better.

There are volumes of research that speak to the positive benefits of participation. Data shows an increase in daily school attendance, grade point average and mental health. Research also shows participants have reduced juvenile delinquency, student discipline, drug use and teen pregnancy. During the COVID pandemic, mental health of our young people became a significant concern. Research showed a direct correlation between isolation and the inability to participate in their favorite activities. Historical data and emerging data continue to show students are positively impacted in multiple ways by participating. There are multiple programs in schools that address student needs, and education-based athletics and activities have proven to support and enhance those efforts. I once heard a Washington state athletic director introduce himself as the director of the most effective intervention program in his school. Upon reflection, his is spot on and research supports his

statement.

In addition to the positive outcomes listed previously, there are an abundance of soft skills learned by participants. Trusted adults guide students in public performances where the students experience success and failure. In today's world of social media, this is an incredibly difficult facet of our students' everyday lives. It is imperative that all students are connected to trusted adults. We call these trusted adults, coaches. In addition, learning to persevere through physical and mental challenges is a by-product of competition. Resiliency, strategic thinking, teamwork, self-evaluation, long-term and short-term planning and goal setting are other soft skills necessary in the workforce that are learned during participation. These soft skills also directly translate to the classroom, which helps our students achieve higher graduation rates than non-participants.

Some may recommend that athletics and activities could be outsourced to the private sector. There are some individuals and organizations that do a phenomenal job leading athletics and activities in the private sector. However, this would be a travesty for most of our students. The most talented and wealthier students will find a place to participate, but a majority of students will not have the opportunity to participate due to limited talent and financial barriers. If athletics and activities were outsourced to the private sector, the benefits of participation would be lost for millions of children. Education-based athletics and activities are different and provide an opportunity that can't be replicated outside the educational space. For this reason, we must educate not only the decision-makers, but all citizens in our communities, so they continue to vote for and support our students' opportunities in our schools.

Athletic and activity programs are the front porch of our schools. It is where most citizens enter our school community and show the most passion. We can do a better job using this opportunity to highlight the value of what we offer as well as other aspects of the school community. We don't have to wait until we are proposing levies and bonds to market the value of education-based activities. The WIAA is working to develop materials for school leaders to utilize when telling their stories. We can't take for granted that others know what we know. We can't take for granted that others are going to continue to support what we do. We must educate and advocate, because our students deserve the opportunity to compete and represent their schools.

Mick Hoffman has been the Executive Director of the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association since the spring of 2019. He is the Association's fifth executive director.

Serving at virtually every level of the WIAA, Mr. Hoffman most recently held the role of Assistant Superintendent and Chief Operations Officer for Vancouver Public Schools. Before taking over as an Assistant Superintendent, he served as the District Athletic Director for Vancouver Public Schools from 2007-15. Mr. Hoffman also represented WIAA District IV on the WIAA Executive Board from 2016-18 where he was a member of the Classification Committee and chaired the WIAA Recruiting Committee.

Mr. Hoffman got his start as a language arts and social studies teacher at Fort Vancouver High School and Hudson's Bay High School in Vancouver, Washington. He has head coaching experience with boys' basketball as well as boys' and girls' golf.

Mr. Hoffman graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Education before earning a Master's of Education all from the University of Portland.



I'm an AD in my seventh year at my school. I think I've finally hit my stride, learned the ropes, and have shaken that feeling of "drinking from the firehose." I consider myself a veteran who can give the "sage advice" when other AD's ask and I am ready to search out

new responsibilities within my school/district/state associations. So, with all this new found swagger, I finally attended the National Athletic Director Conference (this year in Orlando, FL)... here is what I learned:

1. I really don't know much... that's not to say I'm still drinking from the firehouse and just trying to make it one day at a time, but even in year seven there is so much more I can do, and all that I currently do, I can be better. I don't say this to discourage anyone, but to say that **THERE IS ALWAYS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT**. I've always had a growth mindset and would never say what I do/did is perfect, but I was in awe of what some of my colleagues from around the USA are doing with their athletic departments (I feel this way too at the WSSAAA Conference, but it was different seeing it at a national level).

2. Washington State (WIAA/WSSAAA) have it together. I had a suspicion this was true, based on all my interactions with our state associations, but seeing and hearing from AD's from other states; I realize

we are very lucky here to have the mentorship and collaboration opportunities that we do. In talking with AD's from other states, they often felt like they were on an island to figure things out... I can honestly say, I've never felt that way as an AD. Our state conference is fantastic and is modeled very closely to the NADC, so this article isn't intended to slight what WIAA/WSSAAA offers; but hearing/seeing what other states are doing helps solidify that belief that we are lucky here in Washington.

3. It's easy to get stuck in a bubble. As great as Washington is, one of the best experiences from the NADC was talking with ADs from other states. While there wasn't a ton of "down time" at the conference (lots of PD/LTI opportunities), the opportunities I had to hear about how other states/schools are attacking some of the same problems we face (like official shortages, decreased financial support, etc.) was eye opening. I have heard from many AD's in Washington how they are attacking these problems, but hearing from other state AD's opened my eyes to new possibilities and ideas that could be successful in our state/district/building.

I won't go into all the details of the PD sessions I attended, but each one was fantastic. I have already come back and looked at the presentations available from the sessions I didn't attend (one of the nice perks of enrolling) and look forward to continuing to learn from the experts at the National Conference. I hope to see many of my Washington peers at the next National Athletic Directors Conference in Austin, Texas, in December of 2024.

Aaron Brecek is a Certified Athletic Administrator who has served the John R. Rogers (Spokane) community in his current role for seven years. Prior to becoming an Athletic/Activities Director, Aaron served as a National Board Certified Mathematics teacher and an Instructional Coach. As a member of the Greater Spokane League, Aaron Brecek also serves as the 2A District 8 Soccer Coordinator, as a member of the WIAA Technology Committee, and is in his second year on the WSSAAA Board.



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Credit Union Puts \$100,000 in Scholarships Up for Grabs

Gesa Credit Union urges all college students, graduating high school seniors, and recent college grads to apply for their share of \$100,000 in scholarships and student loan relief. If you know anyone who could benefit from these funds, making them aware of Gesa scholarships might prevent a pivotal missed opportunity!

You don't have to be a valedictorian or headed off to Harvard Business School to have a shot at a Gesa scholarship. Gesa awards these funds to support community members that need it most.

Gesa offers scholarships in the following four categories:

- ✓ High School Credit Union Program participants
- ✓ Entering college freshmen
- ✓ Current college students
- ✓ Former college students needing assistance with student loan repayment

Awarding scholarship funds is nothing new for Gesa. Their commitment to higher education has benefited hundreds of applicants—with over \$1 million in awarded funds since 1987—they continue to award \$100,000 in scholarships to their members each year!

You can find more information about the application categories at gesa.com/category/scholarships/

They are currently accepting scholarship applications until February 29, 2024.

Please send any questions to scholarships@gesa.com.



Gesa Credit Union Delivers Education Support Where It's Needed

Students in schools across the state have increasing needs for real-world financial education, and Gesa Credit Union is here to help! Gesa offers several opportunities and programs that meet the students where they are, help fulfill their needs, and supply additional financial support to their schools.



By offering in-person presentations, experiential learning programs, student-operated High School Credit Unions, and an Affinity Debit Card Program, Gesa presents a distinct experience by mirroring real-life situations. Whether it's giving students a glimpse of adulthood, empowering adults to achieve the retirement of their dreams, or assisting community members in gaining a better understanding of poverty, these sessions leave a lasting impact on participants.

Partnering with local schools, Gesa transformed an award-winning student-run high school credit union program to new educational heights. These campus branches deliver tangible financial industry experience to high school students while enabling them to learn how to manage their money in a realistic credit union atmosphere.

The program complements the school's curriculum, can be customized to any school environment, and provides valuable career skills to student tellers and paid interns —setting students up for financial success as they enter adulthood.

Depending on the high school's curriculum, students operate each branch through the school's accounting, financial services, or DECA program. Teachers from each school guide the students in class throughout the year with the support of their campus branch managers and Gesa's Education Team.

Gesa Credit Union also offers its members a unique way to support education and positively impact school districts. Members can select an exclusively designed debit card for their high school of choice through their Affinity program at no charge. This card is linked to their checking account, showcases the community's school spirit with its colors and logo on the front of a Gesa Visa® debit card, and generates a donation for those schools each time members use their cards. These funds are unrestricted; schools can use them for anything that benefits student programs. This offers an efficient way to fundraise for athletics, extracurricular activities, and academics. And Gesa guarantees annual minimums with unlimited earning potential!

All of these specialized programs make Gesa the perfect education partner. To join us in making a positive impact on education, please reach out today!

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Recertification and Reconditioning of Sports Equipment

Understanding the Process

Recertification and reconditioning are necessary to preserve helmet and faceguard protectiveness.

To maintain the original certification, which means proof of compliance to a NOCSAE standard, helmets and faceguards must be reconditioned and recertified according to manufacturer instructions. NOCSAE is the only standards organization that provides a standard for equipment recertification. NOCSAE athletic equipment standards are based on extensive study and scientific understanding of the mechanisms of sport injuries. NOCSAE also funds millions of dollars in research to inform ongoing updates to standards.

These are some of the efforts, in combination with reconditioning and recertification, that ensure certified equipment continues to be as protective as possible across its useful life.

Equipment manufacturers are required to prove compliance to a certification authority, and to satisfy the certifier that they have substantial quality control and quality assurance programs in place.

National Athletic Equipment Reconditioners Association (NAERA) members are licensed by NOCSAE to recertify select helmets and faceguards. This involves highly technical testing procedures to ensure athletic equipment continues to meet NOCSAE's protective standards. Recertification primarily applies to football helmets and faceguards. In addition, lacrosse helmets and softball/baseball helmets are eligible for recertification.

Reconditioning

The inspection, cleaning, sanitizing and repair/restoration of athletic equipment to the original performance standard.



Recertification

Retesting previously certified athletic equipment to ensure the equipment continues to meet the original requirements of the NOCSAE standard. The process includes updated labeling.

TESTING AND RECERTIFICATION PROCESS FOR FOOTBALL HELMETS



A random sample of helmets goes through a comprehensive assessment and two rounds of the NOCSAE drop test, conducted before and after reconditioning.

What athletic equipment is eligible for recertification?

NOCSAE publishes recertification standards only for football helmets and faceguards, lacrosse helmets and faceguards, and softball and baseball helmets. Follow manufacturer guidelines for recertification. Some manufacturers do not permit certain models to be recertified. Equipment that is not permitted to be recertified must include a permanent label that specifies when the original certification to NOCSAE standards expires.

Is reconditioning and recertification required by manufacturers? How often?

To maintain the original certification, helmets must be recertified according to manufacturer instructions. The interval for recertification can vary according to each manufacturer's requirements.

Who is responsible for sending helmets to NAERA facilities to be reconditioned and recertified?

High schools, universities, private leagues and even individual owners are responsible for ensuring their equipment is reconditioned and recertified. NAERA recommends end-of-season reconditioning along with regular inspection and cleaning during in-season use. Inspections and cleanings should be done by a school or organization staff member who has knowledge of manufacturer recommendations.

If a school has helmets that weren't used during the last season, should those be sent to a NAERA facility for reconditioning and recertification?

Yes, those helmets may need recertification. The frequency of recertification is determined by years elapsed (not by use) since the last recertification. If a certified helmet is not recertified within the interval specified by the manufacturer, the existing certification expires. An expired certification can be renewed by recertification.

How long does the reconditioning and recertification process take?

On average, the reconditioning and recertification process takes six or more weeks. In some cases, helmets are stored when received and put through the reconditioning and recertification process closer to the delivery date requested by the school. Production time at NAERA facilities may vary.

When helmets arrive at a NAERA facility how are they processed and selected for NOCSAE drop testing?

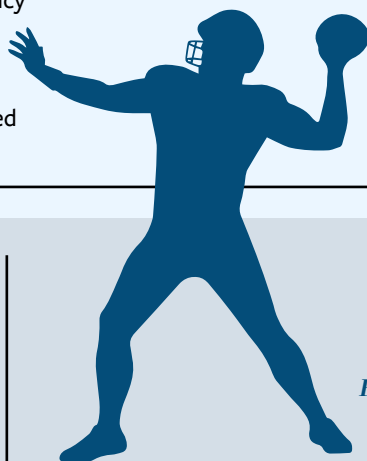
When helmet shipments are received, random samples are tagged for testing. These randomly selected helmets are tested by a technician both before and after reconditioning using the NOCSAE drop test, which requires specialized equipment. All helmets are carefully analyzed and go through a thorough reconditioning process.

How are helmets labeled once the recertification and reconditioning process is completed?

A dated recertification label is added to every helmet with the name of the NAERA recertifying facility and year of recertification. These labels clearly state: This helmet has been recertified according to procedures established to meet the NOCSAE Standard.

What steps are taken to ensure quality control in the recertification and reconditioning process at NAERA facilities?

NAERA's NOCSAE-licensed members across the United States are inspected regularly by a third party to confirm quality control assurance.



NAERA has multiple licensed member facilities throughout the U.S. For a complete list, visit www.naera.net.

1.4m+

Football helmets reconditioned and recertified each year by NAERA members.

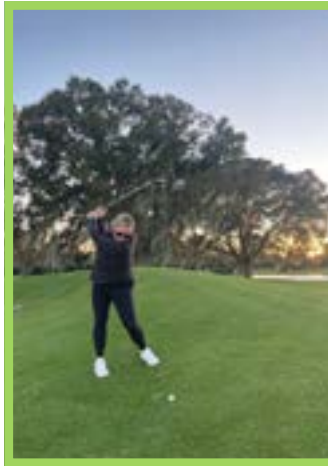
6+ weeks

Average timing for the reconditioning and recertification process at a NAERA facility.

10 years

In most cases, football helmets can be recertified until the helmet is 10 years old per NAERA and manufacturer guidelines.

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