



The NFHS Voice



Transfer, Uniform Rules Must be Followed in High School Sports

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Education-based athletics within our nation's schools have been an important part of everyday life for millions of individuals for more than 100 years.

There are many reasons for the success of these programs. Perhaps most importantly they are focused on the team – everyone on the team – and not the individual. Historically, studies have shown the No. 1 reason students participate in high school sports is to have fun with their peers.

High school sports have been a beacon of light in many communities – providing a consistent gathering place for people in cities and towns for many decades as they come together to support their own children and other students. Again, the focus has been on the team – not the individuals.

The success of these programs is due in large part to structure and focus on educational values – led by the NFHS and its member state associations in the 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

Throughout time, changes have occurred in these programs – most of which have been beneficial and kept high school sports moving forward. Often these changes happen due to a trickle-down effect from the college or professional level. Conversely, however, there are times when changes occur at higher levels and our leadership must hold the line to the fundamental values of sports at the interscholastic level.

Due, in part, no doubt to the proliferation of the transfer portal in college sports, our member state associations are besieged by an ever-growing number of transfer requests. While change may be inevitable, transferring schools solely for athletic purposes is a change that is not good for the future of high school sports and must be stopped.

State associations have transfer rules in place to preserve fair competition and the team focus of high school sports. Transfer rules keep the focus on academics, protect opportunities for other students, promote school and team unity, strengthen student-community bonds and maintain the community-based nature of high school athletics, among many other positive outcomes.

Transferring schools solely for athletic purposes should not be a part of high school sports. This establishes the difference that exists between high school and college athletics.

The other disturbing development at the college level that is becoming more challenging for our membership is the lack of enforcement of uniform rules. The “individual over team” focus of college sports these days is on full display with many players’ pants in football. Pants? Hardly. Call them shorts or cut-offs.

Adherence to playing rules must be enforced at the high school level, and being properly dressed is a part of NFHS playing rules in all sports. Again, the focus is on the team, not the individual. There are dress codes that must be followed in the classroom – it should be no different on the football field or basketball court.

The primary purpose of high schools is to academically prepare students for productive contributions in their future lives as citizens; it is not to prepare students to be able to play sports at higher levels. In upholding the educational mission of schools, state associations have eligibility and transfer rules in place that are designed for equitable and fair participation in interscholastic athletics and activity programs.

The focus of high school sports is different and must remain different. It is education-based and must remain with education as the guiding principle.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is in her seventh year as chief executive officer of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is the first female to head the national leadership organization for high school athletics and performing arts activities and the sixth full-time executive director of the NFHS. She previously was executive director of the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference for seven years.