

NIAAA's Guide to Interscholastic Athletic Administration



National Interscholastic Athletic
Administrators Association

Michael L. Blackburn • Eric Forsyth
John R. Olson • Bruce Whitehead

Editors

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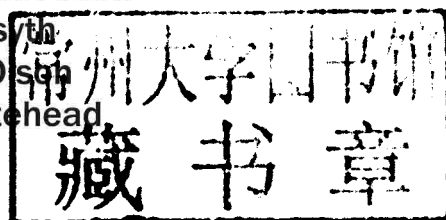
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INTRODUCTION

Challenges in Today's Interscholastic Sport Administration

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Issues in the field of high school athletic administration have been given little attention compared with coverage of the management and administration of Olympic, professional, and collegiate athletics. This is surprising given the impact of interscholastic sports, as reflected in this statement more than a decade ago: "High school sport programs are now the single most significant dimension in the entire sport enterprise" (Robinson et al. 2001).

More than 23,000 high school athletic departments; approximately 300,000 administrators, coaches, and officials (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009); and more than 7.6 million students participate in interscholastic competitions (NFHS 2011). Surely, any endeavor with that scope of engagement merits interest. When combined with the potential for both positive and negative outcomes in that environment, it rises to the level of demanding close scrutiny.

The National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA) appreciates, perhaps more than most, the importance of high school sports in American culture. The NIAAA also recognizes the huge role an athletic administrator can have in enriching that culture and the experiences of participating athletes and coaches. Therefore, we have developed for aspiring and currently employed athletic directors a comprehensive guidebook featuring the very best practices in high school athletic administration.

The chapters that follow present an overview of high school sports operations, written by experienced, successful athletic administrators across the United States. To focus the efforts of the writers, Forsyth first determined several major issues that challenge contemporary high school sport administrators (Forsyth 2007).

After Forsyth's initial research on the major issues in high school sport, a subsequent investigation assessed and ranked the impact of each identified issue (Forsyth 2010). The findings of the second study provided data for the closing section of this book, Priority Issues Ahead in Interscholastic Sports.

Initial Field Research of Contemporary Issues

After interviews with the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) executive board, Forsyth (2010) identified 12 categories encompassing 95 contemporary issues as significant problems for U.S. high school interscholastic athletic programs. To gain deeper insight into these contemporary issues, four experienced and well-respected athletic administrators were interviewed:

- Ken Barreras, director of athletics, Albuquerque Public Schools, NM
- Kim Chorosiewski, director of athletics, Fay School in Southborough, MA
- Dave Stead, executive director, MSHSL
- Bruce Whitehead, executive director, NIAAA

Each provided opinions as to what these issues mean for everyday interscholastic athletic administrators at the local, district, state, and national levels. In addition, all were asked to predict the future implications of these contemporary issues. The following interview responses identify the major challenges facing today's interscholastic athletic administrators.

Initial Research Findings and Commentary on Current Issues in High School Athletics

In the following sections, issues are followed by commentary provided during interviews of experienced high school athletic administrators.

Athletic Administrator Training and Preparation for the Complexity of the Task

Current applicants for athletic director positions are lacking in the knowledge and skill proficiencies required for the job. These deficits make it clear that newly hired athletic administrators must have access to state-of-the-art knowledge and expertise in order to competently lead contemporary high school athletic programs. Following are the opinions of experienced high school, state association, and national leaders in high school sports on this topic.

Ken Barreras: The ability to recruit and retain competent athletic administrators is becoming increasingly difficult for two reasons. First, the scope of work has increased exponentially, making it necessary for an athletic administrator to be well versed in a variety of areas (e.g., legislative impacts, booster club involvement, budget and finance) beyond the normal, everyday

issues of managing people and facilities. Second, the pool of candidates for high school athletic director jobs has become smaller over time, and applicants are less experienced and qualified than in earlier years. To some extent, this phenomenon has evolved because of an increase in the number of nonfaculty coaches who do not have interest in administrative positions. Historically, veteran educators with a great deal of coaching experience moved into administrative positions and used this experience and associated knowledge to administer an athletic program. With fewer coaches remaining in the profession long enough to be considered veterans, the ability to hire experienced and qualified coaches to fill administrator positions has been compromised.

Kim Chorosiewski: As with all roles, a fundamental knowledge base will give an athletic administrator both the competence and confidence to execute the daily duties of the position while being guided by sound principles of education. With experience comes expertise. However, technology and societal demands on sports have undergone massive changes. That being the case, it would be unwise for athletic directors to feel overly confident about the level of expertise they might bring to the contemporary high school athletics setting.

Dave Stead: Given the change in education funding, it's become more frequent that an athletic administrator's responsibilities are combined with student services responsibilities (e.g., assistant principal). Such a combination, regardless of the size of the school, seems to do a disservice to both the administrator and school community. Expertise in the administration of student activities differs widely among educational administrators, and an integral involvement in and working knowledge of athletic and fine arts programs truly is an essential component of a well-constructed school activities position.

Bruce Whitehead: The administration of an interscholastic athletic program today requires a person with broad-based knowledge and training and a passion to serve students and coaches. A school district that employs an athletic administrator lacking these skills creates potential liability exposure. School districts must be committed to providing the best educational opportunities for students by hiring the best-qualified staff in academic subject areas. This same high standard should also apply when seeking an athletic administrator. The NIAAA is the first career, technical, and postsecondary association accredited by the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement. To respond to the needs of employed athletic directors and candidates for administrative vacancies, the NIAAA has developed education and certification programs specific to interscholastic athletic administration. This program provides the knowledge and training athletic administrators need. The enormity of contemporary athletic administration responsibilities has created a mandate for adequate training.

Community-Based Sport Programs Versus School Sport Programs

As more community-based youth sports programs are developed, more student participants are asked to compete for school and nonschool sports teams simultaneously. This arrangement can impose intense demands on students in terms of time and commitment.

Ken Barreras: Athletics and activities, while healthy and recommended for the well-being of the students, have often taken priority over the curricular necessities. As with other health and wellness concepts, participation in extracurricular activities should be limited. It is the responsibility of athletic and school administrators to ensure that the demands imposed on these young people are reasonable.

Kim Chorosiewski: Demand will eventually demonstrate that community and school programs cannot be all things to all people all the time. The economy will force school and community partnerships that will require some political negotiation and grassroots support to sustain educationally sound programs that also meet the needs of all sports users.

Dave Stead: The values gained by students through participation in high school activities are often compromised by coaches whose educational philosophy differs from the foundational beliefs and core values of educational institutions. Care must be taken to support and protect student participants at all levels in order to avoid burnout and overexertion of adolescents whose bodies are still developing.

Bruce Whitehead: Excessive demands on the time and energy of student-athletes both in and out of season are major issues for athletic administrators. Even though student-athletes experience time demands from coaches, many continue to maintain higher grade point averages and have better attendance records, fewer discipline issues, and lower dropout rates than the general student population.

In summary, athletic directors are facing ever-increasing challenges because they are being asked to do more with less. School budget cuts are forcing the elimination of paid positions that support athletic administrators. Budget cuts mean less funding to operate the programs. In addition, the number of responsibilities assigned to contemporary athletic administrators is growing. The position of interscholastic athletic administrator is rapidly becoming a highly challenging job in any school district, requiring the longest workweek and expertise in multiple disciplines.

Parents

Some parents have lost sight, or never knew the purpose, of interscholastic sport programs. The local school athletic program's mission statement should be shared with parents and athletes along with the mission statements of the state association, NFHS, and NIAAA.

Ken Barreras: As with many areas of public education, parental involvement (and lack thereof) and the unreasonable expectations of a small number of parents have created pockets of turmoil in interscholastic athletics. In some cases, a coach's perspective varies greatly from the parents'. Because of emotional responses and challenges by parents, it is my thought that coaches, especially inexperienced coaches, have become hesitant to communicate with parents in any form in order to avoid conflict and dissension. I have witnessed, with increasing frequency, parents intent on extending their decision-making and leadership roles in private-sector community (club) programs to education-based athletic programs. These misunderstandings lead to great confusion and conflict with coaches and athletic administrators.

Kim Chorosiewski: Parents see sports as a social identifier for students while also enabling success as the students proceed through the education cycle. Although there can be a time-demand tipping point in terms of participation in school- and non-school-related sports programs, it is the larger demand on social, physical, and emotional domains that has left player development and growth in question. Some parents are totally entrenched in the culture of immediacy, forgetting all variables that affect sport and education outcomes. Similarly, the line has been blurred by society about the intent of sports and participation at all levels. Educators must never lose sight of the privilege of athletic participation and the organic intent for participating. Athletic administrators must remind parents and coaches that the athletic program should always be compatible with the educational mission of the school, district, state, and NFHS.

Dave Stead: High school activities are not "the other half of education." In fact, high school activities are an integral part of education, and we must continually focus on the educational opportunities provided by state associations and their member high schools. Parents must be taught to focus on the value of participation rather than winning. This commitment must begin with the school board and be fully supported by school administrators in order to support the athletic director in his role within the school community.

Bruce Whitehead: In recent years, dealing with parents has become more time consuming for the athletic administrator and coach. The parental attitude of supporting the school and the coach has completely changed. The adage that "students have changed over the years" is really a myth, but the adage that "parents have changed" is a reality. An increasing number of parents no longer support the school, the team, and the coach. These parents support and encourage only their child at the expense of the team, the coach, and all other participants. They have lost sight of reality with respect to their child and the mission of interscholastic athletic participation. This phenomenon causes the contemporary athletic administrator and coach to devote additional time to educating this growing number of parents.

Sporting Behavior

Considering the worsening spectator conduct and courtesy that coaches, officials, and parents face, there is a clear need to emphasize sporting behavior throughout interscholastic sports. Ongoing proactive educational measures must be a priority for the contemporary administrator. Negative modeling by players, coaches, and spectators at higher levels of competitions creates an image that is emulated in high school sports all too quickly unless consistent preventive measures are taken.

Ken Barreras: Much like educating student-athletes about drug and alcohol use, this is an area that often has a lower priority, with coaches and athletic administrators taking a less active approach. Too often, the teaching and maintenance of sporting behavior are reactive in nature and addressed only after a critical issue.

Kim Chorosiewski: This issue stems from a school and community culture that demands proactive measures in order to protect the sanctity of sport. We are making strides in this area, especially since professional teams are faced with the need to curtail poor fan choices, some of which have resulted in the deaths of spectators.

Dave Stead: Life lessons are learned on the field as well as in the classroom by athletes and fine arts participants. A school board initiative for sporting behavior, supported by parents and community members, is an essential ingredient for a well-rounded school activity program.

Bruce Whitehead: There is no doubt that participation in interscholastic athletics teaches student-athletes character, moral and ethical values, and leadership skills that will serve the students for life. These foundational values may not be taught in private-sector clubs. Of concern to athletic administrators is the growing lack of sporting behavior demonstrated by increasing numbers of students, parents, and other adult spectators at interscholastic sports events. The NIAAA, the NFHS, and most state activity and athletic associations continue to develop advertising campaigns and education programs about the importance of positive behavior. This is yet another issue the athletic administrator of 20 years ago did not need to devote as much time to.

Title IX and Gender Equity

Approximately 4.4 million boys and 3.2 million girls participate in interscholastic sport competitions (NFHS 2011), demonstrating increased opportunities and fairness for both males and females. However, compliance with Title IX appears to have become a double-edged sword. When providing programs for both genders, if there is not enough female interest to warrant adding new competition levels or new sports, this lack of growth can be interpreted as noncompliance unless surveys of student interests can document the reasons for not providing new opportunities.

Ken Barreras: New state legislation in New Mexico has increased awareness of Title IX legislation and gender equity issues in their athletic program. Two positive factors evolved from the increased awareness created by this legislation: (1) better education and instruction about compliance and (2) the sharing of best practices and compliance approaches used by fellow athletic administrators. A negative issue that resulted from publicity associated with the new legislation includes misconceptions and misinterpretations regarding gender equity among parents and coaches.

Kim Chorosiewski: Common sense has distorted the spirit of Title IX in ways that force administrators to support programs that should not exist to satisfy the letter of the law. Revisions should be considered to the Education Amendment Act.

Dave Stead: Schools may be able to turn a perceived negative into a positive by actively reviewing the Title IX three-prong test. By doing so, growth in boys' and girls' athletics may have a positive outcome. The outside-the-box growth of coed teams, collaborative efforts through intramural activities, and other community-generated programs for students who have not yet become connected to standard school offerings may attract an entirely different group of students to athletic involvement at the middle school and high school level.

Bruce Whitehead: For many years, the NIAAA and NFHS have emphasized the importance of Title IX compliance by state activity and athletic associations and schools across the United States. I believe a very high percentage of our schools are in compliance with Title IX because of these education efforts by state and national organizations. However, some needs persist at the interscholastic level.

A school must meet only one of the three Title IX tests, and most athletic administrators work diligently to meet the requirement of accommodating emerging interests. Athletic administrators attempt to offer a sport or new level of competition for both boys and girls when there is demonstrated interest. Factors considered include sufficient ability to field a viable team and adequate numbers to support multiple competitive levels. Athletic administrators who comply with the interest accommodation prong of Title IX usually are found to be in compliance. At the same time, as the director of the NIAAA, I believe we must continue to send the message to our membership that every effort must be made to achieve Title IX compliance by meeting one of the three Title IX tests.

Summary

The contemporary high school athletic administrator faces significant challenges because of increased demands and fewer resources. School budget cuts are forcing the elimination of paid positions that support athletic administrators. Budget reductions also mean less funding to operate the

programs. In addition, the number of responsibilities assigned to athletic administrators grows constantly. The position of interscholastic athletic administrator is rapidly becoming one of the most challenging in any school, and the job increasingly demands expertise in multiple disciplines. This book is dedicated to meeting those needs.

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PART I

Leadership Orientation

The six chapters included in part I provide an overview of the characteristics of successful leadership. Education-based athletic programs must have student learning, personal growth, and total welfare at their core. The chapters in part I address developing a personal philosophy based on the core principles of education-based athletics and how to manage your program, personnel, and student-athletes in a way that reflects those principles.