

School Sports Teach Lessons That Lead to Better Citizenship

By FRED LECOMTE
Specially Written for Back to School

"You just do what's best for kids." Now that we have entered the new millennium and in a state committed to improving education, it is timely for us to do what's best for students in athletics.

While students develop critical thinking and development skills in the classroom, extracurricular activities such as sports can teach students the lifelong lessons of teamwork and participation.

For years we've espoused the educational value of athletics - the development of teamwork, sportsmanship, cooperation, competition, work ethic and more.

At a fraction of the overall school budget, school sports programs are one of the best bargains around. These programs teach lifelong lessons that are just as important as those taught in the classrooms. Unfortunately, there appears to be a creeping indifference toward support by the public and even the parents.

There is no doubt that sports activities enrich a student's school experience while promoting citizenship and sportsmanship. They instill a sense of pride in the community, provide a lifelong education of teamwork and self-discipline and facilitate the physical and emotional development of our nation's youth.

The benefits are many. Students who participate in sports tend to have higher grade-point averages, better at-

tendance records, lower dropout rates and fewer discipline problems generally.

Participation builds self-confidence and develops skills making it easier for students to handle competitive situations. These are qualities we expect schools to produce in students so that they become responsible adults and productive citizens.

Active involvement is often a predictor of later success in college, a career and becoming a contributing member of society. Teachers attribute these results to the discipline and work ethic that sports require.

David Corbin, Assistant Publisher and Sports Editor of *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood*, has served as a health and physical education teacher, as well as a wrestling, baseball and gymnastics coach. Mr. Corbin has also owned a health spa and fitness center.

Mr. Corbin said, "Among the many things that school athletics offers is responsibility. The individual learns that time is important and it is essential to budget his or her time."

He added, "Oddly, despite donating two to three hours a day towards athlet-

ics, the athlete makes the time to do his homework. One thing I know, if you need something done, give it to a busy person.

"Athletics places the individual in the arena of the public and teaches him or her how to work in a team situation. The athlete becomes an extravert instead of an introvert. After all, once the individual goes into the work force, teamwork is essential for success in business," he said.

"Introverts may spin their own little web for their own little world but the extroverts can help make the world work together as a team," said Mr. Corbin. "I can recall the numerous times that I have met CEOs of companies and the first thing I noticed was their high school football plaques or other athletic achievements on the wall. I cannot remember a CEO who hasn't."

"I was always taught that a healthy body creates a healthy mind," he added. "A person who has no interest in athletics may be quite intelligent but probably has lowered the bar in his or her potential to achieve even more."



Fred Lecomte



Ed Tranchina

Noted Westfield High School Athletic Director and Blue Devil Head Football Coach Ed Tranchina believes that parents have to understand first of all that athletics is not necessarily an avenue to college scholarships.

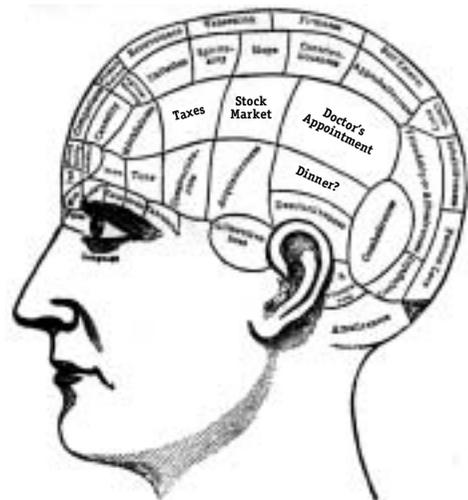
"Statistics show that less than one half of one percent of athletes receive a scholarship," said Mr. Tranchina. "Scholarships are very difficult to get and they are only for the very, very exceptional."



David B. Corbin for Back to School

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