

— A majority said that participating in school activities is a very important part of their high school education.

— 63% said that activities contribute greatly to school spirit.

— 65% said that activities helped to make high school much more enjoyable.

2. What evidence is there that students who are involved in activities make higher grades and have better attendance?

The study of NFSHSA gave findings of five groups to document the link between participation in activities and high grades/better attendance. We can cite only one.

— Higher grades and better attendance are evident in students who participate in activities, according to a study by the Minnesota State High School League. The survey, involving more than 300 schools in the state, showed

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that the average student had a grade-point average of 2.68 (on a 4.0 scale). The grade point average of student-athletes was 2.84, while fine arts students average 2.98. In attendance, the average student was absent 8.76 days a year. Athletes were absent even less — 7.44 days. Fine arts participants were absent only 6.94 days a year.

I contend that the high school student should be given the opportunity to participate in a properly managed athletic program that will help him or her to develop physically, academically, and by God's grace spiritually. The idolatry resulting from interscholastic athletics should not be condoned but should be dethroned. In everything we do and especially in our play we should serve our Lord Christ. In this arena we must fight against all idolatry and testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for having made us His property.

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Interscholastic Athletics... No

Gary VanDer Schaaf

The topic of interscholastic

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sport is a very emotional one. Interscholastic sport is so much a part of our North American culture that to speak against it, even in Protestant Reformed circles, is

to be labelled an ivory-tower egghead, a crack-pot, or a hopelessly old-fashioned, head-in-the-sand idealist. The place of interscholastic sport in our schools has been angrily debated at teachers' conferences, and it has been the source of strife and division within our schools' constituency. I do not wish to renew or add to that acrimony, but the fact is that interscholastic sport is part of Protestant Reformed education today. I wish it were not, but it is. And as long as it remains so, it will be, I believe, a detriment to the intellectual and spiritual growth of the students involved and a threat to the spiritual well-being of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

In this brief article I will discuss only two reasons why Protestant Reformed involvement in interscholastic sport is regrettable. To begin, interscholastic sport promotes poor stewardship of time and ability. In travel, preparation, practice, and game time, a student commits a minimum of eight to ten hours per week to his or her sport, and throughout that week he is told to give "150%" of his effort and ability to the matter at hand. By the end of the season, the student has spent many, many hours and expended much, much effort, time, and energy for which he is accountable to God. How is that student going to justify all that

time and energy spent in an activity which scripture tells us profits little? When I was a student involved in interscholastic sport, I was not told how to do this. When I coached a girls' basketball team, I did not tell my players how to do this. I did not know then how to justify all the time and effort spent in pursuit of sport, and I do not know how to do it now.

It is not enough to say "There are worse things our children could be doing." There are always "worse things" that we can do. But just as surely as our baptismal vows bind us to teaching our children the difference between good and evil, so they demand that we teach the difference between "good" and "better," and "better" and "best." Are we willing to stand before the face of God and tell Him that the hours and effort spent in interscholastic sport are the best possible use of our time and ability?

Neither is it enough to say that interscholastic sport "develops athletic ability in those whom God has blessed with physical talents." To what end is one "blessed with physical talent"? What does one do with that talent in the kingdom of God? How are our covenant youth prepared for the serious business of a life of service in and to the Lord and His church by spending hour

after hour learning to spike a volleyball, hit a curveball, or dribble a basketball? Athletic skills are fundamentally, undeniably leisure skills. Athletic games are just that — mere games. We must realize what we as believers and as a church, surrounded by the enemies of Satan, the world, and the flesh, are all about. We are engaged in unceasing struggle; why are we training those who will someday be the generals and footsoldiers in the Army of the Cross how to behave on furlough from a battle that has no end? Armageddon will surely find us in uniform, but what kind, and whose, will it be?

What about students with little academic ability? Doesn't interscholastic sport provide an opportunity, for some of them at least, to do well at something at school? And besides, don't minimum grade requirements for participation in interscholastic sport promote scholarship? In the first place, we should be neither impressed by nor proud of the level of academic mediocrity demanded by our schools for participation in interscholastic sport. We may let the world insist on what is average; minimums and mediocrity are neither the standards nor the goals of the church of Jesus Christ. And while it is certainly true that some students must struggle to attain even passing grades, why cannot we see

that for the poor or barely average student, the hours and effort spent on sport could be better spent trying to improve his academic abilities? I must confess that it grieves me to hear parents and teachers say that if it were not for the sports program, there would be nothing for their children at school. Why do athletic programs thrive while remedial programs languish? If our children have trouble learning, why do we feel constrained to teach them how to play?

My second objection to interscholastic sport is that it is fast becoming a pedagogical and spiritual graven image within Protestant Reformed circles. By calling interscholastic sport a graven image, I mean that we are ascribing to it powers, abilities, and potentials that as an educational entity or tool it does not have. According to its proponents, the pedagogical power and potential of interscholastic sport is staggering. Diligence, honesty, respect, self-denial — practically every Christian virtue is teachable and attainable through interscholastic sport. For no other subject in the curriculum is so much claimed (with the possible exception of physical education) as for the extra-curricular activity of interscholastic sport.

We teachers are to blame for this. We have despaired, it seems, of teaching values through a study

of God's Word or by the application of spiritual principles to the humanities and sciences. That is such hard work; it bears such little visible fruit. And for teacher and student alike, it is just no fun. Besides, everybody knows that children learn better when they are having fun, and if the student can enjoy himself, learn, and entertain the constituency at the same time. . . . Well, there you have it! A sound pedagogical principle put into practice with the ideal pedagogical tool! We can but wonder how schools ever managed before interscholastic sport, and I wonder why all teachers are not required to have at least a phys. ed. minor, and why participation in interscholastic sport is not mandatory.

Now, one of the saddest things about the claims made for interscholastic sport is that some of them are true, and are becoming truer every year. I am referring to such claims as "interscholastic sport creates and promotes unity within the student body," or "interscholastic sport provides a fine opportunity for fellowship," or "interscholastic sport keeps our young people from drink, drugs, and the temptations of youth." As much as these and similar statements are true, we are making a spiritual graven image of interscholastic sport. Just as we have made interscholastic sport a graven image in our schools, so

we are making it a graven image in what might be called our "denominational mind."

Look again at the claims mentioned above. That which unites our covenant youth is not the shared good times of a game or the shared pride and satisfaction of a public display of athletic expertise: the unity of the one church of Jesus Christ is the unity of shared faith, hope, and doctrine. It is a unity of shared purpose, a purpose that is not to win the next game, but to grow together in grace, in the knowledge of the truth to the glory of God's name.

Furthermore, it is clear (see Phil. 2:1-4) that this spiritual unity is the basis and means of Christian fellowship. To say that interscholastic sport promotes Christian fellowship you must first empty that term of scriptural meaning. A biblical definition of fellowship, as well as a picture of Christian fellowship in action, is found in Acts 2:42-47. (Look it up. See also II Cor. 1:3-6, Titus 2:1-7a, 12b-13, Eph. 5:18-21, Col. 3:15-16, II Cor. 8:1-4, and I John 1:1-3). Now, sitting in the bleachers with other believers, many of whom are demonstrating a profound lack of patience, temperance, sobriety, and respect for authority, and watching our young people compete with a school that often is the embodiment of everything

that the Protestant Reformed Churches stand over against cannot be construed as Christian fellowship. It may be someone's idea of a good time, or of what Christian entertainment should be, but it is not fellowship as Scripture describes it.

We once knew, I think, the true basis, means, and goal of Christian fellowship; the full, rich, and varied church society life of a generation past attests to that. But as we have become more and more "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," we have forsaken the old ways and forged for ourselves a new path, a new conception of the unity of godly fellowship. And in so doing we have created a graven image. We will serve God, but through means of our own devising. We will enjoy the "fellowship of the saints" but on our own terms, terms which increasingly demand participation in or support of interscholastic sport. In short, we will have our game, and play it, too.

And finally, regarding the claim that interscholastic sport is a good means by which to insure and improve the godly walk of our young people, I can only answer that if this is true, the Protestant Reformed Churches are in serious trouble. (I don't believe that claim; interscholastic sport may keep our children "off the streets" for awhile, but

they do take the old man of sin into the game with them. And, speaking from experience as student and teacher, there is ample time before and after a practice or game to sow wild oats.)

If our children are obeying God's laws to insure their participation in interscholastic sport, we have failed miserably at the task set for us in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. It is in this context that I am mystified by parents and teachers who boast that our children and students are better behaved on a basketball court than they are anywhere else. Such is nothing to be proud of; it is, rather, almost a confession of failure and guilt. Is the power of the Spirit working through home, school, and church become so ineffectual that we depend boastfully upon interscholastic sport to teach what it seems the Spirit cannot? Is the Holy Spirit become so weak among us that He is no longer able to write God's law upon our hearts through the study and instruction of His Word? As did Israel at Sinai, are we demanding visual, physical aids by and through which to serve God?

I know that what I have written is idealistic. But so is God's Word, and His church may not be less. I know, too, that what I have said seems hard and harsh, and I mean to offend no

raised interscholastic sport to a place of power and prominence, making it a corollary of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that is a different ball game all together, a very dangerous game indeed.



Values in Education

In an article appearing in *The Grand Rapids Press*, Curtis Gans, director of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, addressed the problem of voter apathy in the United States. In his article Gans pointed out that in the '84 Presidential election there were 80 million people who did not vote, and in the coming Congressional election there will be about 100 million people who will not vote. Gans also cited statistics which show that 20 million people have stopped voting in the past two decades. Gans claims that in this

year's vote the real results are likely to be Democrats 18 percent, Republicans 17 percent, and Non-Voters 65 percent.

Gans then goes on to list what he believes to be causes of this serious problem. The nation's values in education are partly to blame for this, says Gans. He writes:

We have an education system that is too much committed to providing the tools to earn a buck, too little committed to providing the values, skill and civic education necessary to develop an enlightened and participating citizenry.

We have a television-

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