

THE TRUTH ABOUT SPORTS SCHOLARSHIPS

By Bob Gardner, Executive Director of the National Federation of State High School Associations and Ron Laird, Commissioner of the Wyoming High School Activities Assoc.

Many parents are trying to live the dream through their sons and daughters – the dream of landing a college athletic scholarship by specializing in a sport year-round. Unfortunately, most of these dreams are never realized.

The odds of a sports scholarship paying for even a portion of a student's college education are miniscule.

The College Board, a not-for-profit organization comprised of 6,000 of the world's leading educational institutions, reports that a moderate cost for college students who attend a public university in their state of residence is \$25,290 per year. The annual cost at a private college averages \$50,900.

Meanwhile, the most recent data from the NCAA reveals that the average Division I athletic scholarship is worth only \$10,400. More significantly, the same study shows that fewer than two percent of all high school athletes (1 in 54) ever wear the uniform of an NCAA Division I school.

Even if the dream is realized, parents likely will spend more money for club sports than they ever regain through college athletic scholarships. Thanks to the costs of club fees, equipment, summer camps, playing in out-of-state tournaments and private coaching, youth sports has become a \$15 billion-per-year industry.

There is an option, and it's a financially viable one: Encourage your sons and daughters to play sports at their high school.

In education-based high school sports, student-athletes are taught, as the term implies, that grades come first. The real-life lessons that students experientially learn offer insights into leadership, overcoming adversity and mutual respect that cannot be learned anywhere else. Unlike club sports, coaches in an education-based school setting are held accountable by the guiding principles and goals of their school district. And the cost of participating in high school sports is minimal in most cases.

While there is a belief that the only way to get noticed by college coaches is to play on non-school travel teams year-round, many Division I football and basketball coaches recently have stated that they are committed to recruiting students who have played multiple sports within the high school setting.

In addition, by focusing on academics while playing sports within the school setting, students can earn scholarships for academics and other talents—skill sets oftentimes nurtured while participating in high school activities. These scholarships are more accessible and worth more money than athletic scholarships. While \$3 billion per year is available for athletic scholarships, more than \$11 billion is awarded for academic scholarships and other financial assistance.

Without a doubt, your sons and daughters will have more fun, make more friends and be better prepared for life beyond sport by participating in multiple sports and activities offered by the high school in your community.