



# media information



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## **An MHSAA Commentary By Communications Director John Johnson: What's The Bigger Threat To School Sports?**

So much has been made recently of steroid use in sports. Some have taken all the activity started in professional sports and manufactured the perception that the same is true in school sports in epidemic proportions.

We do need to be concerned about the use of steroids by teenagers, some – but not all – of whom are looking for improved athletic performance. There's a health risk, and it is a show of incredible disrespect to the games. It's cheating.

But a little perspective is needed: steroids have been used at least once in the life of fewer than four percent of high school students, most of whom are not athletes or whose first use came after their high school sports careers ended.

There's a bigger threat to sports in general, and school sports in particular, and it reared its ugly head again last week.

During a crosstown inter-league series between two Major League Baseball teams, the always fiery accusation of spitballs being thrown got gasoline thrown on it when the manager of one of the teams said that cheating was OK as long as you didn't get caught. Here's a few quote samples as reported by different media sources:

- “If you're doing whatever you're not supposed to do and you don't get caught, keep doing it.”
- “Everybody cheats. If you don't get caught, you're a smart player or pitcher. If you get caught, you're cheating. That's been part of the game for a long time.”
- “Just don't get caught.”

I asked my son, who recently finished his high school sports career, what represented the greater threat: student-athletes doing steroids, or the “it's not cheating if you don't get caught attitude?” Or were they joined at the hip in some manner?

(more)

## **2-2-2 – MHSAA Commentary – What’s The Bigger Threat?**

“It’s the attitude thing,” my son responded. “So few people have access to steroids or want to hurt themselves by taking steroids that it’s not ever going to be that big of a deal. But the attitude is something that kids get, that parents get – that’s a bigger problem.”

Kids already see some of this attitude in the gamesmanship that takes place around them. The pushing of the envelope one way leads to finding other ways to take their play beyond the rules, but still up to the edge. Those parents looking for an advantage for their child may do anything from turning their heads when they see it happen to teaching their kids how they can get away with certain things during competition. Other parents hold on for dear life hoping their child doesn’t get infected by it.

There’s one antidote for it. The coach.

In fact, the coach is also the antidote for the steroid issue, which pales in comparison to sportsmanship issues. A coach of character who will not ignore or condone gamesmanship or cheating of any type. A coach who demands that players, and their parents, respect the game and everything around it – even if the so-called competitive edge is lost in the process.

Some blow off cheating in sports because it’s just sports. But never has what has been historically called the toy department of life reflected its ugliest realities any more than today. It can change, however. It can change in school sports because we have a different mission. A mission that is not dependent on developing winning teams, but rather winning people. Winning people of integrity who can play the games the way they were meant to be played, and who can in turn play the game of life the same way – with honor.

Fighting steroid use is necessary – don’t get me wrong. But steroids will be one of those sports issues that come and go. Fighting attitudes that promote cheating and gamesmanship is something that never goes away. But day in and day out, high school coaches take on the task of promoting the value of participation, and the values behind the value. They take on the bigger threat and defeat it.

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