



# media information



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## **An MHSAA Commentary by Communications Director John Johnson: Keeping The Proper Perspective**

Two years ago, the bar was lowered when national television crept into an Ohio arena to broadcast a high school basketball game involving the wunderkind player at that point in time. Some called it a defining moment for high school sports.

It was a defining moment all right – a moment that highlighted the slow slide of educational athletics toward the excesses and abuses that plague the so-called next levels of sport.

So almost two years later to the day, where are we? We're back with a made-for-TV game featuring two outstanding players in an intersectional match-up, on a school night. A rematch of when the teams squared off in an "elite" summer camp.

And all that one of coaches involved could do to play down the game was talk about how people think the game is about the top individual on each team and say, "That's too much pressure to put on two guys."

Coach...if that's too much pressure, why did you agree to the game in the first place? Why is a team traveling 400 miles to play this game, not in your gym, but on a college campus? Why the need for the bright lights of television?

When the Ohio circus took place a couple of years ago, observers of school sports and those in the media pointed to policies Michigan schools had instituted years ago to keep live national television out of their gymnasiums and to maintain reasonable travel, noting that the proper perspective for school sports was being kept intact in Michigan.

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Nevertheless, two years later, regional and national sports networks continue to experiment with television for high school sports (usually at the expense of local events), and a company blamed for ruining college basketball has done everything possible to get schools to sidestep rules put in place by educators to conduct what it called the first national high school championship of its type in any sport (cross country) in the past week.

Are attempts of this nature going to continue? Yes, unless educators step up and remind their coaches, their student-athletes and their communities that national television and national championships are not the reason school sports exist; and that the more we buy into the notion that these excesses are good, the less reason we have for schools to offer these after-school programs. We copy the “great divide” between academics and athletics that threatens the integrity of intercollegiate sports.

Improper perspective is already tainting school sports. Tainting it because the trickle-down pressure from the professional (entertainment) to the collegiate (edutainment) to other age levels (mercenary) of sport have coaches and kids, and their communities thinking that there’s no time like the big time.

If we’re truly keeping things in perspective, there’s no time like the present to remember that the reason those other folks exist is not the reason WE exist. It’s time to remember our mission, and who it’s for – and it’s not for elite athletes, national rankings and national television. It’s for the junior high, ninth grade, junior varsity and varsity teams of our neighborhood schools, and the hundreds of thousands of everyday kids who play on those teams. When we are extravagant with the elite, we threaten the rest.

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