



michigan high school athletic association

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An MHSAA Commentary by Communications Director John Johnson: What Endless Argument?

In my daily pan through a variety of newspaper websites recently, I found a story about a high school football event Labor Day weekend which was designed to help pursue what its creator called the endless argument – which state plays the best high school football?

In pursuit of this Holy Grail, teams from seven states – including Alabama, Florida and Utah – are traveling to Ohio; and another group of teams from Georgia, Ohio and Pennsylvania are trekking to play in Texas. Sponsors, of course, are paying most of the travel expenses of the teams, but I pity the poor parent who has to drive the 1,800 mile, 26-hour route from Sandy, Utah to Canton, Ohio. For that matter, in four other matchups in this event, fans will have to travel 1,000 or more miles one-way; and three additional games will require round trips of over 1,000 miles for their followers.

Doing the math, the average round trip for those eight games I just mentioned is about 2,200 miles. So if your car gets what is supposed to be the average miles per gallon – an optimistic 27 – you'll be spending about \$325 on gas at four dollars a gallon to get to the site. One person flying – for example – from Pittsburgh to Dallas for one of these monumental games is about \$350 with a Saturday night stayover – so figure in another \$50 to \$100 for that, plus either cab fare or a rental car, and food. Plus, after the \$14 admission price for adults (\$16 the day of the game), you really pay a premium for that hot dog and soda at these stadiums compared to your local high school field. And remember, that's just one person.

So now you've spent your family's vacation money for the year on this trip. The school may have traded in a home game with a bigger payday to benefit all of its sports teams. But for what? Oh yeah, settling the endless argument. What endless argument?

There's no realistic argument to be had about which state plays better football. These games are more about feeding the college sports junkie's need to know where their next recruit is coming from. Comparing teams and states will always be an apples and oranges situation. The real argument is about perspective. About keeping our athletic programs' priorities in line with the educational responsibility that schools have.

National events and national travel for the few elite teams and individuals is not a responsible way to conduct a program of educational athletics. These events skew our perspective and open the door to the same kinds of abuses that occur at other levels of sports sponsored by other groups.

Besides, with the cost of travel even from county to county becoming an issue, the responsible conduct of school sports programs means keeping them what they are truly supposed to be – educational in scope and local. Schools have already been looking for several years to keep their schedules and their travel local. Participation in the school athletic program is no less beneficial because you played your neighbor as opposed to a New Yorker or a Nebraskan. There are lots of other opportunities in life to travel the country, and school sports shouldn't be one of them.

(more)

2-2-2 – What Endless Argument?

It's going to be another great high school football season here in Michigan. A big part of the beauty of the games is when two communities come together to watch their children play. Where the city or the county championship is sometimes a bigger thing than winning any state tournament. We don't need to compare ourselves with the rest of the country about playing ability when real our focus is on learning life's lessons locally – which is truly what high school sports are all about.

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NOTE: This commentary can be heard this week on the radio program MHSAA Perspective, which airs on over 25 radio stations across the state, and is also available on-demand on the MHSAA Network – www.mhsaanetwork.com.

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