



What High School Activities Mean to Me...

Character Is What You Are When No One is Looking

*When wealth is lost, nothing is lost;
When health is lost, something is lost;
When character is lost, all is lost.*

– Author Unknown

*We would like to thank the members of the NFHS Citizenship Committee
for securing the following testimonials.*

Boo Goolsby, Parent, Bellville, Texas



I love high school athletics! I love the excitement, energy and the togetherness that comes with the competition. I have viewed athletics as a parent and grandparent of athletes, as a spectator in large city high schools, and an avid spectator in a small town (where high school sports is the main “happening”).

As a Parent

As a parent, I viewed first-hand the value of high school cocurricular activities. Our daughter was a member of the high school marching band: our son a multi-sport athlete. These cocurricular activities provided the “other education” that was important in our children receiving a complete high school education. In the classroom, the focus is on the individual—his/her mastering of the subject and advancement to the next level. He studies, takes tests, advances on his own individual skills and efforts. In co-curricular activities, the focus is on teamwork and competition. A “complete” high school education fosters both individual and collective achievement. Cocurricular activities were demanding and required our son and daughter to develop life skills that have served them well as adults and parents.

The values of athletics have been extolled by many, far better than I could, but I am a true believer that athletics develops self-discipline, teaches goal-setting, the value of hard work, respect for others, fosters teamwork, humble winning, and graceful losing. I see in my son and daughter the values they learned from participation in the band and athletics. I can see how it contributed to their development as productive adults, good citizens and loving parents. Each is now parenting sons who are participating in athletics, receiving that “other education” their parents received.

As a Fan and Spectator

Few activities invigorate and excite a community more than high school athletics. So much revolves around high school activities, particularly the school teams, and the pride the community takes in its teams. It brings together, in a common cause, people of diverse backgrounds and interests, as they unite with others in supporting the local team. A sense of pride and togetherness develops among parents, athletes, coaches and fans in supporting the school.

As small town high school fans, we see again the value of athletics in developing character, citizenship, work ethic, teamwork and the many intangibles that participation can bring. And this development I attribute more to the hard work and dedication of practice and preparation than actually playing the game. It is important to win the game, but not near as important as the journey.

I truly believe what high school athletes “become” through sports is more important than whether the team won or lost.

Crystal Allen, Student, University of Nevada



Participating in extracurricular activities, whether it's an athletic team or the marching band, builds character. The discipline and lessons learned enhance the development of the whole student. Students who participate in extra activities learn the value and power of teamwork. Those same qualities help students do well in the classroom. Giving back to the community and learning how to be an active contributing member of society is also a benefit. School athletics, clubs and organizations make time to volunteer in various community activities, from feeding the homeless to picking up litter. All of the skills learned through taking on the challenge of being involved will benefit students when applying to college as well as in the work world. Extracurricular participation is a great way for students to develop character and become a well-rounded individual.

Douglas Foster, Coach, Bellville High School, Bellville, Texas



“You have been working hard!” “You are an important part of this team!” “Our success depends on your involvement!” “You are a special person and player!”

One can hear one or all of these phrases on any campus on any given day. We as coaches have verbalized these phrases in an attempt to motivate athletes or students, and we have heard these same phrases as athletes in our coaches' attempts to motivate us. The benefits of athletics are numerous. We as coaches most often speak of the ability of athletics to teach discipline, perseverance, dependability or hard work. Although each characteristic is of the utmost importance for one to be a meaningful contributor to society, we often neglect to mention the characteristic that makes the attainment of all of those characteristics possible.

The characteristic of which I speak is self-worth. For a young athlete or student to be of importance to society, that individual must feel important. In order for one to be successful, one must have a desire for success. These young people must feel as if they have meaningful impact on society. Numerous people would be aghast to know the number of student-athletes I and many like me see a day who do not have someone who will say something nice or meaningful to them. These young people simply do not feel important; therefore, their level of success is unimportant. These individuals only need an increase in self-worth

for others to see potential become results. Without seeing themselves as worthy, without self pride, all of the aforementioned characteristics mean nothing. I see it as my job to help student-athletes yield results. I am able to complete this task because of athletics. As an athlete, a person learns that numerous people depend on him or her and that he or she is needed. From the star athlete to the fifth stringer who never sees the field or court, everyone is needed and important for the athletics machine to work properly. When an athlete experiences this feeling, that athlete has a sense of belonging and this sense propels them to move forward in all aspects of life.

Many individuals would say that one can learn this in any walk of life, but I disagree. No where can one learn that he or she matters to a group or to other individuals than one can where his very absence can be detrimental to the workings of said group or individual. Once these young people see that they matter, that they are important, then these student-athletes develop self worth. These young adults have the necessary confidence to seek improvement because they feel good about themselves. Once these young adults discover self-worth, the discipline, perseverance, dependability and hard work characteristic we speak most of become easy to achieve. The student-athlete can no longer be denied the opportunity to have success they so desire because they know the secret to success...I am worthy to be successful.

All of the information mentioned above I know to be true because I lived it. Through athletics, the successes I experienced, and the motivation of coaches, I began to believe that maybe I was worthy. I came to realize that positive experiences were a thing that I should expect because I was worthy. Athletics afforded my opportunity to be successful, not because we won or because I started, but because I came to understand that my presence was an integral part of the system, of the team. Without me the team could go on, but with me the team had more of an opportunity to be successful. I firmly believe that athletics gives all young adults this same opportunity. This most wonderful activity teaches all who choose to be a member that they matter; they have the opportunity to be successful; they are, in a word, worthy.

Emma Johnson, Student-athlete, Harrisburg High School, Harrisburg, South Dakota



Throughout high school I have been involved in a number of leadership activities and sports. This involvement has instilled in me traits such as leadership, determination, strong work ethic and teamwork. My participation in basketball has created a great sense of teamwork and cooperation. No game is won by one person; it requires the whole team working together for a common goal. Working with others can prove to be quite difficult at times. And I am grateful that athletics has helped me gain

team-building experience. I have set many goals for my future. All goals are met through determination. The determination to succeed is vital for success. My extracurricular activities have taught me that never giving up will help me prevail and achieve my goals in life. My involvement has also instilled a positive work ethic. Working hard is important in every aspect of one's life and is something to be admired. To spend the time and effort to meet an important goal demonstrates a positive work ethic. I am also extremely grateful to all extracurricular activities for teaching me the importance of leadership. My activities have made me a strong leader in both my school and my community. I am student body president and our basketball team captain. I take great pride in knowing that I represent our high school and our team because of the strong leadership qualities I have developed. Without these activities I never would have become the person I am today, the person I am proud to be. I will continue to use these extracurricular character-building experiences as I go through my life.

Erica Reed, Official

The game of basketball can be beautiful to watch, as players drain 20-foot jump shots, throw no-look passes, make clutch free throws or slam the ball through the hoop. Coaches encourage their players to give extra effort, by diving on the floor for a loose ball or taking a charge. Fans cheer as their favorite player(s) and/or team(s) compete, in an attempt to win the game.

However, an ugly side of basketball is exposed, when these same players, coaches and fans, who work so hard to support their team, direct their wrath at the officials. Whether you've worked as an official or were simply a spectator, most of us have seen a coach, player or fan ejected from a game.

Games have been halted, forfeited and suspended because of fans expressing their disagreement with a call. Unfortunately the game has reached the level where some coaches, players and parents are required to sign an agreement, which indicates they will display proper sportsmanship.

As officials, we have the unenviable task of making unpopular calls and enforcing rules. At games, we should have the full support of all administrators, including athletic directors, police officers and security.

Grant Jackson, Student

In my short time in high school, I have learned a lot about character and diligence. I have reached the age where I have been making my own decisions, and learning from my own

mistakes. Some of the decisions I made this year haven't been the best ones, and my parents have taught me what you do when no one is looking makes up your character. They have taught me that I just can't do what I want; I have to do what is right. Another thing I have learned this year is diligence. To me, diligence is putting the extra effort into everything you do. I used to believe that when the coaches yelled at you they were mad. But now I know that they are just pushing you to the limit, to make you the best you can be. Diligence is also sacrifice. In my family, when you make a commitment you stick to it. There is no quitting. Even if you're not the best, or when playing time is limited for you, you stay and help the team in every way you can. It is so easy to just go to the movies, or out to eat with your friends at times like this. This year, I have matured greatly in many ways, and I can't even imagine how much more I will learn and accomplish in these next few years.

Joy Seiberling, Student-athlete

You're sprinting as fast as you can down the track passing hundreds of screaming people. It may have only been a 12-second race, but it seemed like forever to you; and after you cross the finish line, you stand with pride holding that shimmering gold medal. Track is a great sport. It teaches you about emotional and physical strength, respect and teamwork. Many people believe that strength is simply about having raw power, but that's only half of it. The other half is emotional strength, which is about how you can handle pressure, a win, a loss, disappointment and pride. It is never a bad thing to lose. You can gain emotional power by learning from your losses and changing yourself so you can win. And with every win, there comes respect. But what is respect? Respect is having your peers, teammates, and opponents treating you like an equal, not just an underdog. Hopefully you can gain the respect of everyone around you, especially your teammates. Having teammates means you need to know how to use teamwork. Can you cooperate and get along with your teammates? No one said you had to be friends with but at least treat them as you would want to be treated. Don't ever be afraid to be a good teammate because a team is made up of unique individuals. Sports can teach you many things, some small and some that you will use for the rest of your life. So have strength in yourself, respect all those around you and be a great teammate because the world is just on big team working in harmony.

Kara Groseclose, Student

Citizenship is having loyalty to a specific group and being a great role model. Moral character influences positive qualities that form the individual nature of a person, such as responsibility and teamwork. Through participation in fine arts, such as band, one develops a high level of citizenship and moral character.

Character is also built upon through band. Qualities such as responsibility and teamwork are a large part of the band. The students learn responsibility by playing in competitions. If they want to do well, they will be responsible and practice hard. Teamwork goes hand and hand

with responsibility, because if the band wants to do well in competition, it has to work together and be responsible. With responsibility and teamwork, the band does well and character is taught.

By participating in band and other fine arts, the students learn that citizenship and character not only make the students better in the fine arts event they participate in, but it also makes them a better individual.

Kayla Merritt, Student

From eight in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon, five days a week, we, as a student body, attend school to enrich our minds and to assure an educated path through life. However, what we do after the final bell echoes through the hallways is what defines us as an individual. We choose activities that we enjoy, are talented at or even those we wish to improve in. What we do not realize is each activity that we participate in sets us aside and makes us unique, no matter how many other people are doing the exact same thing as you. Just as each activity individualizes us, it also unites us as a whole. We learn teamwork, diligence, patience and, ultimately, the meaning of hard work. We also come together and accomplish a goal. The small things we learn while having fun helps us later in college, work and the basic mechanics of everyday life.

Kelly Schafler, Student

Citizenship to me is doing something challenging or benevolent for your town and others, and not being concerned about what you may receive from it. It also may be doing something to make yourself feel better about your own character inside. Good character is having traits of someone, like your little brother or sister, to idolize someone who is honest and fair. Both citizenship and character can be developed through participating in athletics and fine arts.

Through athletics, I have learned good character by the coaches teaching us every day to be respectful and disciplined. One of the ways the coaches have taught me respect is their rule, that if you are not able to attend school for whatever reason, they ask us to call in and let them know. The coaches also teach us to be respectful by reminding us to represent our town wherever we go and to be courteous of other teams.

Although athletics is not the only place I am being taught good character, I am in Drama, and my coach expects us to be in attendance and to respect our duty to the other students in the play by attending all the practices. Especially for the One-Act Play, where every person involved has an important role or job and everyone is counting on you to not quit.

Character and citizenship can be somewhat put along the same guidelines. Both of these involve caring, caring for others, caring for your town, but mostly caring about what you think of your own actions.

Kimberly Konecny, Student

A good character is a high moral quality of a person, and citizenship is a feeling of loyalty and allegiance towards your community. Students improve in these aspects when they participate in athletics or the fine arts.

Band and tennis have helped me learn to work better with other people. In tennis, when I play on a doubles team, I have to be able to communicate with my partner so that we know what the plan is for that game. It's impossible to play a solid game of tennis if we never even talk to each other. And in band class, I have to be able to cooperate with the rest of the members of my ensemble for the song to work. The different parts have to fit together like pieces of a puzzle, and the only way to achieve that is to help each other along and practice together.

Whenever I travel to other places with the band or the tennis team, I feel a certain loyalty towards my school and my classmates. We all watch out for each other and make sure that every member of our group is having a terrific time. We are proud to be representing our school and strive to do the best we can at concerts and contests to ring our school honor. Almost every person who tried out for region band made it, and many people progressed on to area as well. Three people even made it all the way to state and the rest of us are extremely supportive of them.

Character and citizenship are vastly improved when students participate in athletics or fine arts. I'm proud to be a part of these wonderful programs at my high school.

Lindsey Huebner, Student

Citizenship is doing something wonderful for your community. A desirable character is one that contains responsibility, honesty and being caring and fair. Citizenship and character can be developed in athletics and in fine arts in many ways.

My character has been developed through softball and band. Both activities teach me how to work together as a group to acquire the final result. In softball, we are taught to communicate with our teammates so that we work together smoothly. Band teaches me to sound like a part of a whole, to clutch and keep an amazing sound.

I have learned that softball and band teach me to have wonderful citizenship. My coach teaches me to have good sportsmanship no matter what the outcome of the game. I have also learned to pick up after myself, by leaving the field as clean as it was when we arrived. In band we learn that in order to have a wonderful concert, we must work together and be responsible. We also must be responsible in how we take care of our instruments, and how we behave on trips and at concerts.

Citizenship and character will reflect on what and who we become in our future. Band and athletics have now helped me build a better future for myself and my community.

Maisey Grief, Student

Character involves an individual's moral values and qualities. Citizenship involves allegiance and loyalty to one's government or authority. These two aspects of a role model are the keys to a sophisticated and civil society. Athletics and fine arts allow students to develop the excellent personal standards through patience, dedication, unity, and other such qualities.

The classes in fine arts teach patience and perseverance. For example, students in my high school band have learned to work together and work hard by using their musical abilities. As a flute player, I have learned to put time and effort into my work to develop more as a musician.

Athletics can also encourage students towards favorable attributes of character and citizenship. By working in a group, such as being on a tennis or basketball team, students learn the importance of teamwork and unity, both essential aspects of a good citizen.

Athletics and fine arts both encourage teenagers to develop a positive character and qualities of good citizenship through patience, respect, effort, teamwork and diligence.

Marissa Ruehle, Student

Many people view extracurricular activities simply as extra things to do just for fun. While these activities are fun, they are also just as much of a learning experience as school classes are. These activities build good character traits and focus on teaching the participants to be the best they can possibly be at whatever they do.

Being part of a marching band is just like being on a sports team; in order for the performance to go well, whether it is during the game or at half-time, every member of the group must set aside what has happened earlier in the day, lock in and focus on the task at hand. If all the members of the group do not pay attention to what the others are doing, the whole thing will begin to fall apart. Teamwork is a skill that is crucial to success, not only in these activities, but also throughout life in the "real world." Extracurricular activities help

you gain independence, but they also make sure you realize that you cannot do everything alone. Even sports or competitions that are classified as “individual activities” are not truly done alone. In order to succeed, you must receive help from the people around you. Life is not an individual “sport.”

Band has helped me become more comfortable in assuming any kind of leadership position. I used to be “the quiet girl,” but now when I am asked to help someone learn his or her music, I do it and don’t give uncertainty a place in my mind. That concept has transferred to the rest of my life, so now I am comfortable explaining math problems, taking charge of group projects and speaking in front of others.

The final character trait that holds the most personal importance to me is to be the best you can be no matter what you’re doing. If you give it your best shot you are sure to do well. Even if you lose the game or don’t place the way you wanted to in a contest, if you gave it your all, you know you did all you could and will know how to improve for the future. At one of the first half-time shows, our band marched this year. Not everyone tried their hardest; as a result our drill suffered and the other band looked much, much better than we did. We all felt horrible about letting ourselves down. The next week, everyone remembered what had happened and put forth their best effort, but the other band still looked better. However, this week we knew we had done our best, so we were pleased. Throughout the next few weeks, we worked a little harder than we had before, so by the time we went to our first marching contest we were GOOD. When you put out your best effort, no matter what the scoreboard says, you are still a winner.

Nece Ruff, Student

Character is moral strength and excellence. Citizenship is loyalty to your community and the people around you. By participating in athletics and fine arts programs, you gain these qualities and so much more.

As a young athlete and band member, I have grown so many ways through my participation in these activities. Athletics makes you so much stronger physically and mentally. Some may wonder, how can a simple 50-minute workout each day build character? It may not seem likely, but trust me, it does. When you push yourself to work hard in athletics, and you find yourself sweaty and out-of-breath at the end of a workout, it’s hard not to respect the others next to you who are just as tired. When you’re on a team, you have to work hard and trust that everyone else works just as much. Respect and trust are two qualities that a person of good character possesses.

Nicole Benson, Student, Limestone Community High School,
Bartonville, Illinois



“Get involved.” That was instilled in just about every freshman’s head as we entered high school – the next big phase of our lives. Looking back on my past three years of high school, I see many relationships and memories that were made along the way – bonds that no one can break that were created by participating in team sports. I experienced that first hand being a part of the track and cross country programs.

Being involved in two sports that are just as physical as they are mental was a great challenge for me throughout my past three years of high school. The sport of “running” not only put me in good physical health but also taught me life lessons. I learned that you have to believe in yourself when accomplishing goals because self-doubt can be your biggest setback. That was something that I finally realized when the time came for my last high school state cross country meet. I accomplished a goal of being a state champion that I had been chasing for three years.

When looking at high school sports, I have always seemed to come back to a basic math equation. Although hard work is one part to competing in any activity or sport, dedication is another very important piece as well. I learned that when an athlete involves hard work plus dedication, all that it can equal is a more-prepared individual. I believe that also applies not just to people in sports or activities, but in everyday life.

Through every loss, win, up or down along the way, I wouldn’t want to change a thing. I have been taught the importance of being a leader, respecting others, and having a good attitude, no matter the situation. The step I made of getting involved in track and cross country was one of the best decisions I’ve made for myself.

I know the values that I have picked up on throughout high school will benefit me for the rest of my life.

Ronnette Costain, Volleyball Coach, Harrisburg High School,
Harrisburg, South Dakota

Life is full of wins and losses. It starts at a very early age, from that first step we try to take as a baby to finding success in our adult personal and professional lives. Because of my participation in high school athletics, I am who I am today. Stepping in front of a crowd of people to perform your skill, no matter if it is singing in a choir or playing on the volleyball team, can teach a student about being successful when he or she performs well or the team wins. Yet, it can teach humility in how you react to a poor performance or in defeat. High

school extracurriculars are just another classroom outside of the traditional math and science rooms. The lessons kids learn today will influence their lives far beyond their high school days. I am proud of all that my athletes accomplish on the court, but I am even more proud of being a part of who they become and the part I played in getting them there.

Sabrina Sandoval, Student

Citizenship is being a respectful, good Samaritan and helping your fellow citizens. Good character involves the traits you possess like being honest or kind. It's the way you act. Citizenship and character can be developed through participating in fine arts and or athletics.

By participating in agricultural classes, I have become a better communicator and a better person. The values taught in agricultural, as stated in the FFA Creed, are honesty, the golden rule, treating others the way you want to be treated, and always helping someone in need. Athletics has helped me to learn how to persevere and endure. Even when it gets hard you just have to keep going. For example, when we go outside and run on the track, it gets hard but you just have to keep going. It also teaches to always be respectful toward adults, like coaches and teachers, and your fellow athletes. Through agriculture and athletics I have built my character in a positive way.

Citizenship has been taught in agriculture by helping others in the community and being kind and courteous. Whenever I go on an agriculture trip or a game for athletics, I must be on my best behavior and always be respectful. Athletics and agriculture have taught me teamwork, which adds to being a good citizen because you learn how to work together with different people. In athletics, when I am part of a team, it's like we become one. Like the saying there is no "I" in team, there isn't one most important player but there is one team and many important players. As a member on a team, I have to always try my best so I don't let any of my teammates down. It's the same way on my chapter-conducting team for agriculture. I must know all of the material necessary as president so I don't let down my team. Citizenship is taught by participating in agriculture and athletics.

Through athletic and agricultural programs, I have learned to be a better person. It has taught me citizenship and helped to build my character.

Samantha Yianitsas, Student

You're almost to the finish line, and your heart is racing. The last 1.8 miles was a mixture of hard work and diligence. Two hundred yards are ahead, and you take it at a solid sprint.

Finally, that white line of grace appears and you triumphantly jump over it to claim your spot in that meet.

Perseverance. It can take a person through a 15-minute cross country race, and also through all the years of his or her life. Extracurricular sports, such as cross country, can teach you this easily developed character trait. The willingness and effort that you set forth will get you somewhere in life, but only the pace at which you set it determines how far you go. Being able to push through obstacles and withstand harsh pain allows you to get a running start in life. The determination and perseverance that you learn in athletics will open a whole new doorway in life, if only you remember to use the key: perseverance.

Tanya Nygrin, Coach, Round Top – Carmine High School



Athletics and competition are not just about winning and losing. Athletics is about all of those other things that help to develop a young person into a productive adult in our society. Athletics and competition teaches the student about themselves – showing their strengths and weaknesses and allows those students the opportunity to grow and expand in all aspects of their lives.

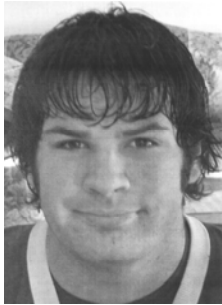
Athletics and competition teaches loyalty, discipline, putting others in front of yourself, work habits, learning how to take direction from an authority figure, setting goals, accomplishing those goals, setting standards that rise above even their own expectations, learning to respect others that are in the same arena that they are in, and becoming a better person because of the difficult times and the joyful times that athletics brings about.

I believe that athletic competition does all of these things if the coach sets those standards and demands the same from the students. This idea of competition is defined not only on the playing field but even more in the classroom and in the lives of the athletes outside of school.

These are the factors I believe can help to make it possible for the students to achieve whatever their life's goals are and that is what we are in the field of education for – to give our students the maximum knowledge for making those decisions that will affect their lives and knowing how to respond in those circumstances.

Life is a tough teacher and the playing field will only get tougher and we have to train our students to meet those challenges and give them the tools necessary to be successful.

Zachary Fuller, Student, Dexter High School, Dexter, New Mexico



Ath-lete (ath'let), n. a trained competitor in a sport exercise, game requiring physical skill.

But, being an athlete requires more than just being able to run fast or jump far. It requires many different characteristics that make up the total person including those which show integrity. One of those characteristics is respect. Some people think respect means only respecting oneself by dressing nice or looking out for themselves, but that's not true respect at all. Respect shows admiration for others. Respect shows consideration for others. Respect shows courtesy to others. And respect shows regard for others. If you call yourself an athlete, it's only true if you display respect because an athlete shows admiration of other athletes and teammates. An athlete shows consideration for how his actions will affect his team, his school and his town. An athlete shows courtesy to others by displaying good manners and an athlete shows regard for others by putting the needs of others before his own. Being respectful is simply just doing what is right. But without respect you are just an ordinary player pretending to be an athlete. So whether it is shaking hands with the opposing team, spending time with little kids who look up to you, or simply taking off your hats inside the building, respect is a part of character that is the key to being an athlete and a winner. Plus, it's not difficult or complicated to be respectful so you can keep yourself from a lot of trouble and a lot of extra running after practice, which is a good thing.