



The NFHS Voice



Begay Cites Importance of High School Coaches During Hall of Fame Speech

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Several weeks ago, the NFHS hosted its annual Summer Meeting involving key leaders from the 51 state high school associations. In addition to celebrating the 50th anniversary of Title IX, one of the highlights was the induction of the 2022 class into the National High School Hall of Fame.

Among the 12 inductees this year were four former high school athletes, who not only were involved in multiple sports and activities in their high school days, but who have “paid it back” through the years to ensure that others have opportunities.

These former high school athletes emphatically noted that the most important individuals who helped them achieve success during high school – and

into their future careers and lives – were their coaches; and in most cases, that athlete-coach relationship continues today.

In his video remarks, **Notah Begay III**, a three-sport athlete at Albuquerque Academy in New Mexico in the late 1980s and a four-time winner – and only Native-American – on the PGA Tour, talked about the importance of his coaches – and the school – in keeping him in the right lane.

“The relationships I built at Albuquerque Academy and the wonderful coaches I had were keys to my success,” Begay said. “My soccer coach in my senior year, Bruce Musgrave, was the head of the English department. I wasn’t able to initially achieve the required minimum score on the verbal part of the SAT that I needed to qualify to get into Stanford.

“Well, who tutored me? Who got me ready? Who trained me at 6:00 a.m. in the morning on weekdays at school to take the SAT again? It was my soccer coach, Bruce Musgrave. I’m indebted to him for putting that time in and believing in me that I had the ability to do what I did. I look back on those years fondly. They were wonderful. It was sports and the people affiliated with those sports teams that were provided by the school that gave me that pathway to my future.”

Some might say success for a high school coach is winning 80 percent of the games, being named coach of the year or bringing home successive state titles. Begay would say success comes in the form of a coach taking extra time to help a student-athlete with homework.

Other measures of success are consistent teaching of values, character and sportsmanship. We are indebted to the hundreds of thousands of high school coaches who will take the field, court, band room or music hall this year to serve as important role models.

In addition to the significant role played by his coaches, Begay, during his Hall of Fame acceptance speech, also referenced the high school “experience” itself, relationships formed with peers and the importance of high school sports in shaping a student’s life.

“What I really appreciate – and still to this day appreciate, especially having seen sports go in a variety of different directions over the last five or six years – is just the purity of the high school game,” Begay said. “How an athlete can show up with very little experience as a freshman, but with an interest and a love for whatever that particular activity may be, and be able to be coached, be able to be developed, be able to be guided – not just on the field, but also in the classroom.

“I just think that’s a wonderful gift that each and every one of us as athletes has experienced in our lives. We all had a chance to receive an education at some wonderful universities – myself, at Stanford – and I wouldn’t have been able to do that without, of course, my soccer coach who tutored me, but also anyone and everyone who put their time and effort into my life. My parents, my two sisters, my wife have been paramount supporters of me throughout our lives.

“As an athlete, you have to be so selfish and focused in order to do your sport, and as I got away from my athletics and I segued into television, I had to grow up. I had to learn. I had to not be so selfish and be a parent and be a husband and a friend. And those are all things that I knew how to do because I had great guides and mentors in high school.

“My high school friends are still my best friends in the world, and they still treat me the same way. . . So, when you want to keep it real, you always go back to your high school friends because that’s where everything is pure, and in a lot of cases, for good or bad, high school is forever.”

We recall another former high school athlete and Hall of Fame inductee – former NFL tight end Keith Jackson of Arkansas – who during his speech in 2001 said, “There’s no time like high school.”

Those men and women serving as high school coaches are the lifeblood of our programs. The past few years with the pandemic have been challenging for high school students – and coaches – as mental health issues have accelerated.

As another year of high school sports and performing arts programs is at our doorstep – one filled with hope and expectations for the 12-plus million student participants nationwide – first and foremost let’s take care of each other every single day.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is in her fourth year as chief executive officer of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is the first female to head the national leadership organization for high school athletics and performing arts activities and the sixth full-time executive director of the NFHS. She previously was executive director of the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference for seven years.