

HIGH SCHOOL ACTIVITIES BRING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

By Bob Gardner, Executive Director of the National Federation of State High School Associations and Alan Beste, Executive Director of the Iowa High School Athletic Association.

Tailgates. Pep rallies. Friday night lights. The new school year is here! And that's exciting news for student-athletes and high school sports fans alike.

Research shows that being a student-athlete is about a lot more than fun and games. Student-athletes learn important life lessons, too. In fact, high school athletes not only have higher grade point averages and fewer school absences than non-athletes, they also develop the kind of work habits and self-discipline skills that help them become more responsible and productive community members.

Attending high school sporting events teaches important life lessons, too. High school sports teach that we can live in different communities, come from different backgrounds, faiths and cultures, cheer for different teams, and still have a common bond. The joy of watching students participate.

That's why attending the activities hosted by your high school this fall is so important. It's not only an opportunity to cheer for your hometown team, it is also an opportunity to celebrate what you have in common with other schools and communities.

The bond we share is mutually supporting the teenagers in our respective communities. We applaud their persistence, tenacity, preparation and hard work, regardless of the color of the uniform they wear. We acknowledge that education-based, high school sports are enhancing their lives, and ours, in ways that few other activities could. And we agree that, regardless of what side of the field we sit on, attending a high school sporting event should be an uplifting, enriching, family-friendly experience for all of us.

Many of the high schools in our state lie at the heart of the communities they serve. Schools are not only educating our next generation of leaders, they also are a place where we congregate, where people from every corner of town and all walks of life come together as one. And at no time is this unity more evident than during a high school athletic event.

This is the beginning of a new school year. Opportunities abound inside and outside the classroom. Let's make the most of them by attending as many athletic events at the high school in our community as possible.

Turn on the lights, and let the games begin!