



Op-Ed: Playing sports for more than a scholarship

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Many parents across America are trying to live the dream through their sons and daughters. It's a popular dream: Land a college athletic scholarship by prioritizing traveling sports teams or specializing in a single sport year-round.

Unfortunately, most of these dreams are never realized. The odds of a sports scholarship paying for even a portion of a student's college education are miniscule.

The College Board, a not-for-profit organization comprised of 6,000 of the world's leading educational institutions, reports that a moderate budget for college students who attend a public university in their state of residence is \$25,290 per year. The annual average budget at a private college checks in at \$50,900.

Meanwhile, the most recent data from the NCAA reveals that the average Division I athletic scholarship is worth only \$10,400. More significantly, the same study shows that fewer than two percent of all high school student-athletes (1 in 54) will ever wear the uniform of an NCAA Division I school.

Even if the dream of getting a college athletic scholarship is realized, parents likely will spend more money on club sports than they will regain through college athletic scholarships. Because of the costs of club fees, equipment, summer camps, playing in out-of-state tournaments, and private coaching, youth sports have become a \$15 billion per year industry.

There is another way to get competition, camaraderie, and life lessons from sports, and it's a financially viable one: Encourage your sons and daughters to participate for their high school.

In education-based high school sports, student-athletes are taught, as the term implies, that grades come first. The lessons learned through high school sports experiences offer insights into leadership, overcoming adversity, and mutual respect that cannot be picked up anywhere else. Coaches in an education-based athletic setting are held accountable by the philosophy, mission, and goals of their school district. And the cost of participating in high school sports is minimal in most cases.

While there is a belief that the only way to get noticed by college coaches is to play on club travel teams year-round, many top-tier Division I football and basketball coaches recently have stated that they are committed to recruiting students who have played multiple sports within the high school setting. They believe there are physical, emotional, and social benefits to being a multi-sport student-athlete.

By focusing on academics while playing sports in a school setting, students can earn scholarships for academics and other talents – skillsets that are oftentimes nurtured while participating in high school activities. These scholarships are more accessible and worth more money than athletic scholarships. While \$3 billion per year is available for college athletic scholarships, more than \$11 billion is awarded annually in the United States for academic scholarships and other financial assistance.

The Iowa High School Athletic Association firmly believes students will have more fun, make more friends, and be better prepared for life beyond sport by participating in multiple sports and activities offered by their high school.