

ON NATIONAL EVENTS & BROADCASTS Jack Roberts – October 23, 2014

Every time past leadership of the National Federation of State High School Associations has flirted with proposals to endorse national events or floated its own ideas for national events, the result has been increased division within the National Federation family and increased interest by outside organizations to conduct such events. A fast, firm refusal to be involved is the best strategy for the National Federation's leadership; and it is the only position that the NFHS Network can take. It is the National Federation that is to influence the direction of the NFHS Network, not the other way around.

Parragon's recent initiative for high school football bowl games is merely the latest of what has been five decades of proposals from outside the school community to exploit school-sponsored sports. They come and go as brief, superficial surface currents, without stirring the deep waters of school sports.

What makes this latest proposal the least bit unusual is the unabashed bribery: It is bribing select schools to badger, berate and belittle their state high school associations; and it is bribing those state high school associations to bend or break their rules.

Nothing changes the fact that the football bowl proposal is bad for competitive balance among a state's high school football teams by allowing one select school extra weeks of practice and loads of free equipment and cash.

Nothing changes the fact that the extra focus on football is bad for winter sports programs at the selected schools and creates gender equity problems all around.

Nothing changes the fact that the extra physical contact is bad for the same players that state associations have been trying to protect with recent rules changes to reduce the amount of contact in football practices.

The NFHS Network was formed with explicit promises that it would **not** be involved with national postseason events. A quick reversal in the face of its first challenge not only would break its promises but also boost the prospects that there would be even more – not fewer – proposals in the future for exploitive, excessive events of this nature – a nature that has made a mockery of the educational premise of intercollegiate athletics.

The NFHS Network would not help its member associations by accepting a broadcast role for these events. That role would only add some credibility to and encourage more of such events.

Parragon's proposals would briefly benefit a miniscule percentage of our member schools. It is elitism that we passionately profess to oppose. The proposals are for a few teams with high-profile coaches or players; and the events would only serve to raise the profiles of those schools higher so that **they**, not the state high school associations, would be calling the shots in the future.

If state associations feel pressure to cave in now, imagine how much worse it would be if the NFHS Network were involved and more of these events existed.

The NFHS Network's role is to broadcast an unprecedented aggregation of regular season and state association events and to establish such breadth and depth that it is **the** authentic, dependable place to view school sports in America. State associations should respect and protect this heroic effort which over its first five years will post video productions of perhaps 100,000 high school events and pay participating associations nearly \$15,000,000.

This dwarfs any commitment by any promoter, and it demands that we demonstrate backbone, both within our states and nationally, when less committed enterprises drop by to exploit the tiniest tip of our precious product – broad-based local, amateur, educational athletics.