



The NFHS Voice



## High School Athletics/Activities Participants Making a Difference in Communities

**Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff, NFHS Executive Director**

 @KarissaNFHS

Throughout the month of October, the NFHS has been promoting the values of high school sports and performing arts during National High School Activities Month. In this comeback year, it has been rewarding to see the return of sports and other activities in schools nationwide.

Some states are already starting playoff competition in football, cross country, volleyball and other fall sports, and speech, debate and music participants are looking forward to state-culminating events.

In addition to the many students, coaches, administrators and officials who are excelling “on the job” are others who are making a difference off the field, court or stage in their communities.

As we celebrate National Community Service/Youth Awareness Week October 25-31, we want to highlight a few of these remarkable individuals who have exhibited various random acts of kindness the past few weeks.

Perhaps most remarkable was the quick response by the Goddard High School (Roswell, New Mexico) football team to a specific need off the field. On its way to a game against Artesia High School, the team bus was at an intersection south of Roswell when the coaches and players saw an accident happen.

According to Goddard head coach Chris White, one of the vehicles turned over a couple of times and was on its top. "I jumped off the bus and ran to the vehicle that was upside down," White said. "The driver was trapped but could communicate that he did not think he had a neck or back injury." Two Goddard coaches, along with the bus driver and athletic trainer, tried unsuccessfully to lift the car enough to free the driver. That's when the team sprang into action.

A couple players left their seats from the back of the bus and joined the effort. The rest of the team followed. The players were able to help flip the car so the driver could safely get out of the vehicle. Goddard's athletic trainer, Andrew Aguillar, rendered aid to the driver of the second vehicle after helping lift the car.

"This was one of the best moments I have ever experienced as a coach," White said. "I have coached in eight state championship games and never felt the emotions I felt when I realized what my boys did. They poured off the bus like ants and ran down in the ditch to help render aid. It was incredible and I have never been prouder of a group of young men. I can only say that I'm proud to be a Goddard Rocket."

In Ohio, it was a cheerleader at Bowling Green High School who went above and beyond to make an impact in her community – and in the life of a special three-year-old girl.

According to an article on WTOL.com (Toledo, Ohio), Emilia Esposito rallied the student body at Bowling Green High School to dedicate a Friday night football game to Gracie Barnes, a three-year-old girl battling brain cancer. The support for Gracie included wearing yellow bows for childhood cancer awareness, a special cheer for Gracie and a break-through sign with a yellow ribbon.

“I felt the community really just should get in on this,” Esposito said. “Just to help her out. I think the family just needs that little boost of happiness. And I think it’s important to get involved. And just so the community can be aware of her situation and we can keep her in our thoughts.”

In Tennessee, the impact that teachers and coaches have on the lives of student-athletes was on full display at Cookeville High School through a program entitled “My Jersey, Our Journey” in which seniors give their jerseys to the teachers or administrators who have made a big impact on their lives.

In an article on WSMV.com (Nashville, Tennessee), it was reported that Clayton Barrett, a student-athlete at Cookeville High School (CHS), chose CHS wrestling coach Scott Cook because “I feel like he’s taught me a lot of life lessons on the mat and outside the fieldhouse.”

In presenting his jersey to Cook, Barrett said, “This is the last time I’ll be able to give my jersey out because it’s our last home game and it’s my senior year. I feel like you’ve taught me the most life lessons I can use outside of the sports program here and I want to give you my jersey.”

Finally, back in New Mexico, when one school suffered some adversity, others were there to help. According to an article on KVIA.com (El Paso, Texas), less than 12 hours before the Las Cruces (New Mexico) High School Showcase Band was scheduled to perform in Albuquerque, a rental truck full of the band's equipment was stolen.

"We were heartbroken," said Ty Frederick, the director of bands, "We experienced a lot of emotions: anger, heartbreak, grief. We thought, 'Oh my gosh, what are we going to do?'"

However, Frederick was inspired by an outpouring of support from multiple schools, including Organ Mountain High School and New Mexico State University. He said multiple Albuquerque programs also reached out to loan equipment, including El Dorado High School, La Cueva High School, Rio Rancho High School and the University of New Mexico.

"It's been overwhelming," Frederick said. "It's devastating in the stuff that was stolen, but with the other schools that were helping out, we're able to perform. The performance must go on."

The value of students being involved in high school sports and performing arts programs? These examples say it all.

For more information on National High School Activities Month, visit the NFHS website at <https://www.nfhs.org/media/1016835/2021-nfhs-national-high-school-activities-month-campaign-booklet.pdf>.

*Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is in her fourth year as executive director 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*

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