



The NFHS Voice



NFHS Learning Center Courses Help Individuals Achieve True Success

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff, NFHS Chief Executive Officer

 @KarissaNFHS

Many years ago, the NFHS published an article by Bernie Saggau, the former executive director of the Iowa High School Athletic Association, in which he shared an experience from a coaches seminar led by the legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden.

In the morning session, Coach Wooden's lecture revolved around his famous Pyramid of Success. He talked about the building blocks of loyalty, self-control, confidence, alertness, friendship, skill, initiative, cooperation and competitive greatness, among other traits and behaviors.

During the lunch break, two young coaches were discussing the first half of the seminar, and one of the coaches was overheard saying, "I will be glad when he tells us how to be successful!"

Obviously, these young coaches had missed the message. They had expected Coach Wooden to diagram some plays that would help them become winners – victories, championships and fame. They failed to recognize that he was sharing the very tools that could have started them on the road to true success – changing the lives of young student-athletes.

This example of overemphasis on winning versus helping students to become successful individuals in life through sports and other activities illustrates the impetus for the NFHS starting its Coach Education Program in 2007. Beginning with two courses – Fundamentals of Coaching and First Aid for Coaches – it was the first and only education program designed exclusively for interscholastic coaches.

In announcing the program, Tim Flannery, the former NFHS assistant director who was responsible for starting the program, said, “. . . winning must take a lesser role to learning. If winning is the primary goal, it makes it impossible to achieve our purpose. Thus, the program was created in order for coaches to find the happy balance between winning and teaching.”

And the response by individuals who want to keep winning in the proper perspective has been encouraging. Fifteen years later, the NFHS continues to help coaches and others involved in high school sports, performing arts and other activity programs through the online platform now known as the NFHS Learning Center.

The Learning Center (www.NFHSLearn.com) now offers about 90 courses, including more than 60 that are free, for students, coaches, athletic directors, school administrators, parents, officials, performing arts educators, music adjudicators and others involved in high school activity programs. Amazingly, more than 15 million courses have been taken since the inception of the program.

Three years ago, the NFHS Honor Roll program was initiated as an incentive for schools to encourage their coaches to become involved in professional development. Coaches can take key courses that assist in their roles as teacher-coaches. Since the implementation of the program, 120 schools in 17 states have taken advantage of this professional development opportunity for their coaches, including 96 schools earning Level 1 status, 16 with Level 2 and eight schools earning Level 3 status.

Last month, the three-level NFHS National Coach Credential was introduced, which is designed to keep high school coaches engaged in professional development throughout the year and has the same required online courses as the School Honor Roll program.

Coaches can become a NFHS Level 1 Coach by completing “Fundamentals of Coaching” along with three free courses: “Concussion in Sports,” “Sudden Cardiac Arrest” and “Protecting Students from Abuse.” When 90 percent of a school’s coaches complete these courses, the school can earn Level 1 status through the School Honor Roll program. Additional courses are required to advance to Levels 2 and 3.

While the Learning Center’s courses are directed primarily to those in interscholastic sports and activities, our outreach continues at the youth levels. Recently, American Youth Football, Inc. (AYF) announced it is requiring all coaches on its regional/national track (about 50,000) to take the new, free “Football Tackling” course on the Learning Center.

Our ongoing commitment to learning and professional development for individuals in high school activities has not gone unnoticed. Recently, the NFHS and its Learning Center earned accreditation by Cognia, which nationally recognizes schools and other education service providers that meet rigorous

standards that focus on productive learning environments, equitable resource allocation that meet the needs of learners, and effective leadership.

This accreditation demonstrates our commitment to excellence and our desire to be the best we can be on behalf of the students we serve. We want to continue to provide appropriate leadership and resources to help everyone involved with high school education-based activity programs.

Remembering the seminar led by Coach Wooden, we believe the future of sports and other activities within our nation's schools is dependent more on developing players rather than plays.

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.