

## Chapter 11

# Dealing With Adversity: An Examination of the COVID-19 Impact on High School Athletes and Their Coaches

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020, has been that rare world-shaking event, from its effects on health, economics, and politics to its influence on attitudes, behavior, and wellness. In a particular context, high school sports have also been greatly altered by the coronavirus, as many spring seasons were abbreviated, truncated, or aborted altogether in the wake of the pandemic spread. This chapter seeks to examine the effects of the pandemic on high school coaches and athletes in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, a southernmost region comprising four counties on the Texas-Mexico border and about 1.5 million people. The Valley, as it is known, has one of the lowest per capita incomes per region in the United States, and it is an area where high school sports is a very important vehicle for all its participants.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Contests of strength, speed, and skill have been a part of human life since the beginning of time, in terms of the impact of physicality on success in hunting and defense/warfare, and also as regards cultural development, competition, socialization, and cohesion. The notion of “play,” according to Johan Huizinga in “Homo Ludens” (1938/1971, p. 5), is an important element of the cultural development not only for youth but for all members of the society.

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It has been suggested that play and physicality have always tended to be co-opted into a larger economic framework, i.e., professionalization of these organic tendencies (Michener 1976, 201; Baker, 1982, 32), leading to problematic issues such as gambling, blood doping, and over-reliance on sports, to name a few.

Still, the natural benefits of physical exercise and play are undeniable, particularly applicable in the context of youth. Traditional literature concerning sports is replete with recounting of the positive effects of athletics on young people, including the building of teamwork, sportsmanship, and respect for rules, among others. The stories of American author Burt L. Standish (1903/2008) during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, collected into the fabled series featuring the fictional Frank Merriwell as hero and exemplar of good sportsmanship and competition, acts as a prime example of the propagation of ideas through what one might call a “rhetoric of athletics,” in connection to its helpfulness as a socialization and teaching device of the young.

Sports (and fanship) have also often acted as a compelling vehicle for building connections and pride of place, often in a spatial, geographical sense. Benedict Anderson (1983, p. 45) shows how people come to see themselves as part of an imagined community even though they rarely have any contact with others in the group. Anderson’s notions of connection pertain mainly to nationalism but can also be imputed to sports, i.e., school or community spirit. In a nationalistic sense, athletic events play a role in propagating and maintaining national identity, as attested in numerous books about international football – soccer – and its importance to identity, e.g., Ian Hawkey’s 2009 (p. 39) work, “Feet of the Chameleon,” about the sport’s contribution to post-colonial African identity construction.

But what happens when the teaching, learning, and fan support are interrupted, and the exercise and play are curtailed by chance? When the COVID-19 pandemic exploded in the spring of 2020, it eventually caused the cancellation of most of the world’s sporting endeavors, both on a professional and amateur level.

As of September 2020, most American high schools were struggling with how – or even whether – to resume athletic activity on campus, after most spring sports (soccer, baseball, softball, track, for prominent examples) had seen their campaigns postponed, abbreviated, or in many cases canceled altogether. In the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, comprising a series of small towns on the Texas-Mexico border, the second wave of the pandemic in mid-summer put this usually obscure area in the international headlines as one of the worst “hot spots” of the virus.

The latest Texas high school football season was thus put into jeopardy because of the rampant outbreak on the border, where communities totaling 1.5 million people suffered some of the highest worldwide percentages of infection and death (Solomon, 2020).

For communities which are often overly dependent on sports for entertainment – the Valley has three of the four poorest counties in the country (Custer, 2015; United States Census Bureau, n.d.) – and in a state where football is sometimes more of a religion than simply a pastime, as reflected in H.G. Bissinger’s (1991) “Friday Night Lights” phenomenon, the end of competitive athletic events was potentially a bigger disaster for participants than for those in other more affluent places with the money and ability to find other pursuits.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the effects of the 2020 suspension of athletic competition in the Valley, focusing on high school-age student-athletes and their coaches, detailing their struggles to come to grips with the abeyance of not only their routines but their dreams. As Michener states in “Sports in America” (1976, p.252), sport has always been an important safety valve for residents in low-income communities, offering the chance to parlay success in games into an elusive college education on one

hand, and giving vital feedback in the form of positive self-image, recognition, and increased self-worth on the other, regardless of whether they play at the next level.

Using in-depth interviews with coaches and student-athletes who had their seasons squelched, the research will examine the classical conception of the value of play, competition, and organized athletics, suggesting that for many student-athletes living on the impoverished border, the suspension of games was not only a crimp in extra-curricular style, but in some cases a serious threat to their development, their ability to use baseball, softball, or track as a way to carve out their niche in the world, in college athletics, and finally, a hit to morale and self-esteem. Nonetheless, the student-athletes attempted to persevere with help from coaches.

The stories of these athletes and coaches will help illustrate the importance of sport to physical and emotional/societal development as well as to the opportunity to attend college and continue sporting careers. Many of the subjects were able to rebound from the pandemic and the wake of cancellations; others were not. The point of this research is to trace the basic contributions athletics has traditionally made to various aspects of development, exploring these notions of, among others, teamwork, sportsmanship and cohesion, to examine how the traits in question – not to mention chances of the dream of using skill and ability to provide a college education – were affected by the COVID-19 scourge and its devastation visited on the stunted sporting season of 2020.

## SETTING THE STAGE

There are endless versions of literature and lore extolling the virtues of sports, from the ancient Greek notion of a sound mind and body – *mens sana in corpore sano* – to the Muscular Christianity movement that originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Putney, 2001). The latter was characterized by a belief in patriotic duty, discipline, self-sacrifice, manliness, and physical beauty of athleticism exemplified somewhat earlier in Thomas Hughes' (1857) series of stories which began in 1857 with "Tom Brown's Schooldays."

As stated, in America, the Frank Merriwell saga as told by Burt L. Standish, is a prominent example among many that sought to plump for athletic competition as an excellent way to inculcate health, wellness, and All-American virtues such as teamwork, sportsmanship, and discipline.

A more recent variety of the genre comes from the Friends' Central School in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, a K-12 educational entity with ideological roots in colonial Quaker times. On the school blog (Crowley) in 2019, administrators came up with a rubric to explain the pluses associated with organized athletics, based on research in psychology and kinesiology, among other fields of academic study. Titled "6 Benefits of Participating in High School Sports," the post gave advice on choosing a sport for children and for aligning an educational philosophy with a family's principles, incorporating extracurricular activities as one of the keys to this successful mesh. Here are its major findings:

### 1. Physical Health and Wellness

The article suggests that sports promote physical health at a vital time in a young person's life and quotes the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study showing that those who participate are less likely to engage in negative activities such as smoking and drinking and less likely to suffer from obesity and/or diabetes. Sports also serve as an outlet to relieve the stress that comes from academic and social life, which can improve mental health overall.

## **2. Leadership and Teamwork Skills**

On the Friends' site, soccer coach Luke Nowell describes the importance of development in this area, noting that gradually, student-athletes mature and grow into leadership roles and eventually "take younger players under their wing by showing them the ropes." He adds that sports help participants cultivate valuable life skills, such as empathy. While working for a common goal, student-athletes learn appreciation for their peers, and the team concept learned on the field "carries over into the classroom and beyond, creating a more positive school culture as a whole."

## **3. Mentorship**

The Friends' document argues that facilitating professional growth and success for others is integral in the high school setting, where coaches are ideally the ultimate mentors for their kids, guiding them in pursuit of goals and reaching their potential. Nowell adds that coach-player relationships help the student-athlete on the field but also in school, extending to college aspirations and preparation for the next level. Coach-athlete relations create a "bigger picture" perspective for students, sometimes helping them develop as contributors in the community aside from sporting endeavors. Taking part in a strongly collaborative environment gives students tools they can use to be successful in life.

## **4. Time Management**

Preparation is a key component for student-athletes, whether it's getting ready for a game or a test in school, and sports helps high school students balance their tasks and schedules. Again, this skill development and planning will probably teach the principle habits that will last a lifetime. Nowell says he has seen kids begin to adjust to the rigors of college work and sports even before they get there, based on high school experience in this area. "A lot of kids enter college and struggle to play catch-up and adjust to day-to-day life," he writes. "Our students have already been living it for four years, so it makes the transition seamless."

## **5. Improved Academics**

Several studies have linked positive academic results to participation in high school athletics. The Friends' site notes National Federation of State High School Associations' (2020) research revealing that participation was independently associated with higher GPAs for student-athletes. Efficient preparation and improved communication skills can be transferable from field to class.

## **6. Accountability and Responsibility**

Sports are supposed to teach participants to be responsible through daily requirements, including showing up prepared and on time. The coach's goal is to teach student-athletes to hold themselves and each other accountable for actions that will directly impact the team as a collective. Inculcating the value of collaboration and team spirit, as well as the ability to learn from mistakes and correct them, is a huge part of the coaching experience. By building character, staying positive, and communicating effectively, participants in high school sports ideally grow as individuals and as members of a group.

## Summation of Benefits from Sports Participation

Nowell adds that athletic programs are an integral part of the curriculum at Friends' and are "used to cultivate intellectual, spiritual, and ethical promise of our students."

One of the most important aspects, he adds, is to teach students resiliency by "learning to fail. To take that failure, learn and grow from it and bounce back even stronger, is so crucial not only on the field, but the classroom, and in life" (Crowley, 2019).

## THE CASES

### Overcoming Adversity

Edinburg High head baseball coach Robert Valdez went through his share of adversity in 2020, from being reassigned (later reinstated) to the death of a parent. But he says that having to see his seniors miss the majority of their last go-around was perhaps the toughest of the setbacks.

"For a lot of kids, this is their outlet," said Valdez, a former standout athlete himself at the school. "It means a ton to our guys to get some recognition, raise their self-esteem. The fact that our season was cut short, it damaged what we are trying to do as coaches, which is help the kids build life skills, to make them into good leaders."

Valdez worked with his players to help them through the cancellation of the season, which occurred in mid-March before the first district game had even been played.

"How to overcome adversity," he insisted. "They need to be ready for that, because it's going to happen in life, too, later on."

Valdez, who has established one of the Valley's most consistent contenders over the past decade, believes strongly in mentoring. He has plenty of stories about kids he's coached who have gone on to make it, graduating from a school of humble means in one of the poorest areas in the country.

"One of our guys came here from Mexico, didn't speak English yet, but he worked hard and always listened. Now he's an engineer," Valdez related. "We have several players who have gone on to become coaches. Really, it's not about wins and losses or the monetary reward we get from this job. It's about the relationships along the way. We had one guy who no one ever thought would go to college; he didn't show any interest in it. But after four years with us, he took a shot, made it after a few hiccups, and is now in law school. That's what sports is all about to me, helping kids become successful."

Valdez states that when he was coming up as a Bobcat, his coaches were instrumental in teaching him discipline and commitment. And now he's passing it on, paying it forward, as they say.

"They gave us tough love, and it worked," he recalled. "They made sure we knew what the real world was going to have in store for us, and that's what I am doing now in my coaching role."

In terms of the end to the 2020 baseball season, Valdez felt tremendous empathy for his 12<sup>th</sup>-graders.

"It was just an abrupt end because of COVID," he said. "There was no preparation for their last game; hell, we didn't even get to play district ball. Such an abrupt end, and one guy, he had been injured in football, missed half the season. He rehabbed and worked hard to come back ready for baseball, and then this happened. Everyone was shell-shocked by what happened, but for him, it was a doubly difficult thing. But I told him and the other seniors, 'This is the greatest lesson you will get about what it's like

to face and handle adversity.' It's left a bitter taste, to be sure, but there was nothing any of us could do except just deal with it."

### **All About the Future, Now**

Rigo Sanchez is a colleague of Valdez in the Valley coaching fraternity. As head baseball coach of Economedes High and also a football assistant, Sanchez, like Valdez, was a standout in sports in high school and has worked at his alma mater for the past 12 seasons. Also, like his Edinburg High mate, Sanchez has completed a master's degree in higher education and someday plans on entering administration, perhaps as a principal.

With that in mind, he focuses on the future, for himself and for his kids.

"We play an important role in terms of leadership, and one of the things I believe in is what can be learned through participation in athletics," he said. "I had a lot of positive influences on my life as I came through, coaches who helped me believe in myself against the odds."

Economedes is one of the most challenged schools in the area where poverty has a long legacy.<sup>14</sup> The majority of the 2,200 students come from low-income households, and many are migrant workers, traveling the country doing farm labor from late spring to late summer. This means they miss large swaths of the school year in attempting to help their families put food on the table.

"It's all about the big picture; we have a lot of kids who have important roles to fulfill at home," Sanchez explained. "They can't always make it to practice, and many of them cannot afford the training and equipment that kids from other richer districts can afford. So, we have to allow for their circumstances while also pushing [them] to work hard and be successful. It's not that they don't have talent; it's often that they don't have the time or resources to concentrate solely on their sport."

When he was in high school, Sanchez was one of the stars of an Economedes football team that had won just one game the two previous seasons before breaking through to a playoff appearance in 2004. And he uses that experience all the time in mentoring his guys.

"The coaches got us together before the season and they made us believe that we could be successful," he remembered. "And when we were able to make the playoffs, win a game and almost go to the third round, a lot of the things the coaches were telling us, well, they stuck with us as we left school and got on with our lives."

When his players tell Sanchez that they cannot come to practice because they have to work, he understands.

"We say, alright, no problem, get here when you can," he said. "I let them know that I get it, I was them, I grew up here and went to school under the same circumstances. That connection, the fact that I know what they are going through, I think it helps them see that we are committed to them. And that also shows them what good leadership and coaching are supposed to be."

Sanchez believes, as does Valdez, that instilling confidence is one of the vital jobs of a coach.

"Frankly, because we have never been that successful here in sports, sometimes the kids have a morale problem," said Sanchez, who led the Jaguars to a rare playoff appearance in baseball three seasons ago. "We tell them that hey, it can be done; you just have to work, make no excuses, and battle through adversity. Sometimes we end up being father figures to some of these guys, their home life is difficult ... some don't even have fathers at home. Being involved in sports may be the brightest part of their day, and we as coaches always have to remember that. We try not to discourage them or be negative; I

feel like our responsibility is to make it fun for them, so they can enjoy playing and take off some of the pressure they feel in life.”

As for the cancellation of the latest season, Sanchez was as shocked as any of the players.

“We were having a tournament here in town, and my phone started blowing up with rumors. I thought, OK, maybe we will miss a few days, and then we’ll be back at it,” he opined. “But gradually it became apparent that the season was lost, and for my seniors, they were devastated. They never got to finish what they started. But bigger picture again, we would have loved to finish the season, of course. They didn’t even get to have a season-ending banquet. But what we hope is that the things they have learned in high school, through athletics, will help them move into the world and know that no matter what happens, on the job or at home, they can tough it out and find a way.

“At Economedes, our job as coaches extends past games, all the way into the kids and their lives, their hopes and dreams, and their future,” Sanchez noted. “That’s something we all focus on. We have to do it that way, to me. It’s more important than just baseball for our kids; they need us to help them get ready for what lies ahead.”

## **Relocating Self During COVID**

One of the reasons she transferred into Edinburg High after her sophomore year had to do with school spirit. Once she got to her new school, Seci Lopez knew instantly she had made the right decision. Bobcat Pride is a long and storied tradition since 1919, and even though there are four schools in town now, Edinburg High was the original. And that matters to the kids, coaches, and fans.

“I felt so comfortable right away. Everyone at EHS bleeds red and blue; everyone was so welcoming to me,” she recalls. “The spirit here was amazing, and someday I am going to come back here as a coach ... I want every student to have the great experience I did. I want them to love it there just like I did.”

Lopez was a softball prodigy, starting the game at age six after having watched her older sister play the game. Each of the Lopez girls was destined to compete at the college level, Sara at Texas A&M-Kingsville and now Seci, who is in her freshman season at McClennan Community College in Waco, six hours north of the Valley.

“I loved the sport because of my sister,” Lopez said. “I started playing, and pretty soon it was my life, all the season, summers with club ball, it became a way of life.”

The path seemed obvious: complete a fine high school career as a pitcher and outfielder and go to college to continue the dream. However, life had a twist in store for 2020.

“We’d played 15 or so games, got our tournaments in and were about to start district,” she said. “Then there were rumors about COVID, everyone was like, ‘It’s here, it’s here, it’s in McAllen’ [adjacent town to Edinburg]. Some people were saying it’s fake, but somehow, I just knew, the minute the rumors started: there goes the season ... I knew we were done.”

The personal irony was that the Lady Bobcats had just played Weslaco East High when the cancellation news broke.

“Last year in the playoffs, I had the game of my life against East,” Lopez grinned. “I went 5 for 5, and now I was going back to the same field, same opponent. Little did I know that this would be my last game in high school. I didn’t do very well in the game; I guess I was thinking about it way too much. I kind of knew this was it.”

One way or another, though the loss of her senior season was a crusher, the softball star knows that it has all been worthwhile.



"I know that without softball, I wouldn't have been nearly involved in school or life in general. I would have been a little bum."

Lopez served as a student athletic trainer for the football team for two seasons at Edinburg High, was active in the National Honor Society, and took part in numerous extracurricular events through church.

"I think that besides sports, my involvement in community service was the most rewarding part," she explained. "I was able to see other people's situations, put myself in their shoes, and develop a lot of empathy and understanding about what life is all about."

Sports seemed to jumpstart her life in every way, causing her to craft a work ethic and dedication that extended past the diamond into the real world. And this dedication paid off during her first months at McClennan.

"It started off horribly; we all got COVID right off the bat," she related. "I got really sick, actually, and there I was, so far from home and having to fight it off and stay positive."

Having gone through a tough regimen of training in high school and having seen that pattern take hold and become part of her everyday attitude, Lopez was able to weather the storm.

"It was partly physical, just getting the virus," she said. "But a lot of it was mental, I had to be strong and get into the struggle, and I feel that because I had some tough coaches who worked me to death, I was ready to face this adversity and compete against it."

Lopez noted that in high school, she learned that one has to work hard for what they want.

"And you know what, as far as physical training, once I was able to get back to it, I worked harder than ever once I was ready. I probably hit it harder during quarantine than I ever had before."

The other silver lining to the COVID pandemic is a more spiritual one. Having been active in church all her life, Lopez discovered that dealing with sickness and lack facilitated a rebirth of sorts.

"I definitely needed my faith to make me stronger during all this, especially since I was also starting college at the time," she pointed out. "I had sort of lost my way recently for various reasons, but I was able to get back to myself and find Him again."

On the day she was interviewed, Lopez commented that she had just returned from a church outing, a socially distanced College Night event at one of Waco's many houses of worship.

"I had been wanting to find a church up here, you know, start to get back to my faith," she mused. "And a few of the girls on the dance team invited me, all random ... and I am so, so glad that they did."

## **Case Analysis and Relation to Literature and Theory**

The goal in analyzing the interview data was to make connections between the words and phrases used by the subjects to describe their situations and the historical literature on sports and its benefits. The interviews were free-flowing and unscripted, as opposed to the orchestrated set-up sometimes used in focus groups, for example, with the purpose of avoiding the error of "priming the pump" or eliciting responses based on preconceived notions.

With this in mind, it is striking that each of the subjects' discourse mirrored the rhetoric of athletics so often seen in classical texts on sport, such as the Standish stories from a literary perspective and the Friends' website on benefits in sports. This may be a case of socialization or transmission of key ideas and phrases from teachers – in this case, coaches – to their mentored subjects. It also may be said that the experiences that coaches and athletes have had – which they discussed in the interviews – truly reflected the literature and rhetoric. It is suggested here that both outcomes are in play to a degree. The athlete who was interviewed spoke of the discipline and work ethic she learned and honed during her



career, and the way these traits helped her overcome the obstacle of being saddled with COVID almost immediately after going to college.

The interview method also indicates the strengths and weaknesses of the qualitative research tradition. On one hand, people who talk about their lives in depth will generally reveal aspects of their experience that are “authentic,” in that their words are their assessments, and if they have not been prompted too heavily by pre-conceived interview questions and suggestions, one must take on face value the things that they say. However, there is always the possibility that the interview subject has glommed on to what the researcher is after and – as many such studies have shown – display the tendency to “play along” or offer what they perceive to be “socially desirable” answers.

Then there is the limitation to authenticity: just because someone says they have done things on the basis of this or that lesson learned, the researcher must be aware that there is no real way, in an ontological sense, of ascertaining without doubt, the reality of their motivations, or for that matter establish any ironclad causality between lessons imparted over time and subsequent behaviors. Someone can say whatever they want in an interview setting, and the only way to get a more valid and reliable data set would be to engage in long-term participant observation, which is relatively difficult to set up and execute for a number of reasons. Minus an ethnographic design over an extended period of time, where actions and speech of subjects tend to yield a richer, more nuanced, and to an extent a more defensibly verifiable context through real-time, organic events, the researcher is dependent on the talk that subjects make; there is no way around that.

Nonetheless, the speech acts of the subjects for this study do suggest a certain alignment between the rhetoric of sport and the experiences rendered by the interview subjects. With that in mind, the discussion of school spirit and camaraderie by Seci Lopez suggested that much as the literature reads, this subject did find a real emotional benefit from participation in sports.

The back story here is that in the South Texas town of Edinburg, where there are four schools in heated competition with one another every year, the original school in town, EHS, is known for Bobcat Pride. The researcher, with decades of work as a sports journalist covering these teams extensively, can corroborate the fact that this particular school has a demonstrably greater degree of spirit among fans and players, coaches, too, and this makes it a classic example of an imagined community. Though a town with a population of 100,000 will offer more chances for members of an associative organization (here, a sports program in a school, but also the fan base and the student body, combined) to have actual contact with one another, a large part of Bobcat Pride is associative and not intimate. Anderson’s notion about nationalism is that through symbols – and identification with them – members of a group transcend barriers of time and space to forge unity and bond over various shared affinities. Lopez as much as said that she transferred from one school to another because of this factor. Ironically, the school she left was more successful in softball than the one she went to, and that speaks volumes about the qualities of the program she decided to join.

Lopez has also participated steadily in community service and church fellowship, and while one cannot suggest that simple participation in athletics was the key determinant in the development of these aspects of her life, it can be suggested that she feels that sports, discipline, teamwork, et al., have contributed to the construction of her constellation of activities. Here, sports, much as has been the case in post-colonial countries, has offered her a sense of pride in place and personal achievement, an identity in a team context of softball, both in high school and college.

As for the coaches who were interviewed: each spoke at length about the way they were coached and mentored when they were athletes and noted at several junctures that they have used these experiences

to help them in coaching careers. While again, this sort of party line can be assessed as an example of socialization, realizing this fact does not detract from the interactions the coaches have had with their student-athletes, and it does not gainsay the effects that their work with the kids has achieved.

To wit, Robert Valdez' stories about helping his baseball players get interested in college – in an area where the level of educational attainment lags well behind that of most more affluent areas – reflect that as long as we take on face value the speech acts of the subject, we can surmise that in many cases, sports has made the difference in the futures of some student-athletes falling into the at-risk category, for various reasons. Valdez' story about the Mexican student who mastered English and went on to success at the next level, as well as the tale of the player who never thought about going to college before joining the Bobcat program, are instructive. Both anecdotes illustrate that with repetition of fundamentals such as discipline, time management, and accountability, some student-athletes will mature and improve, and keep on doing the things they have learned in high school at the next stop along the way.

Which brings the study to Sanchez, the Economedes coach who has mined his past as a student-athlete at this severely challenged institution to construct morale and belief in his baseball players. The striking aspect of his story has to do with the future. As a master's graduate in high education, Sanchez is well versed in the rhetoric of social justice and amelioration of inequalities, and he uses his position as coach – and future administrator – to get his kids motivated and determined to overcome their problems, on and off the field. Like Valdez, he stressed confidence and self-esteem as important goals he seeks to bolster in his teams, beyond results on the field. In trying to get the Economedes players ready for "real life," he uses lessons learned along his life path to instruct and show the kids he has empathy for them – because he was there himself once – but also to get them used to avoiding excuse-making and simply to keep pushing forward.

The wild card in this study was, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic, and each of the subjects spoke at length about the challenges, disappointments, and recovery that eventuated in time. Their talk of the crisis and its effects mesh with the benefits of sport literature, both fiction and non-fiction varieties, suggesting that the subjects experienced the COVID situation in a sporting context and that their adventures on the field have assisted them in dealing with the overarching anxiety, writ large, of 2020.

In sum, it can be supposed that high school athletics, though certainly not a panacea for all problems, or the only avenue through which adolescents can learn, progress, and achieve, has in some instances lived up the rhetoric of the sports storybooks and of public relations-inflected organizations such as the Friends' Central School in Pennsylvania. For the trio of subjects in South Texas, success and fulfillment in life has been aided substantially through athletics, which has taught teamwork, discipline, and perseverance, day after day. Their experiences, while not technically generalizable to a larger population, are resonant of the sort of qualities that high school sport has always insisted it has sought to inculcate in its participants.

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