



The NFHS Voice



No NIL (Name, Image, Likeness) Benefits While Wearing High School Uniform

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff, NFHS Chief Executive Officer

 @KarissaNFHS

Along with recruitment and retention of officials and related behavior issues in high school sports, which were addressed in this column last week, another concern across the high school landscape this year has been the impact of Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) on high school athletics.

It has been less than one year since the NCAA suspended its longstanding amateur rules to allow college athletes to monetize their success and profit from their NIL, and many changes have occurred at that level. And, throughout the year, several state high school associations have established policies to help high school students navigate through murky NIL waters.

The state of officiating, NIL and information about the 50th anniversary of Title IX, were among the subjects discussed during the NFHS' Media Availability Session yesterday. A recording of the webinar is available [here](#).

With regard to NIL, we realize that high school students can be tremendous entrepreneurs – they already are in a number of capacities. Students have the ability to be recognized for their athletic prowess and that can be a nice opportunity for a young person.

However, the NFHS and its member associations believe high school student-athletes should not be able to benefit as professionals from something they do not own – that is their high school uniform. The NFHS and its member state associations would not support a situation that would involve a member school and a student-athlete entering into a professional contract while representing that member school.

Right now within the 51 member state associations, while some state statutes are bringing high school student-athletes into their language, no student-athlete in a member school can be a professionally paid student by virtue of their identity as a student-athlete in that member school.

We believe the purpose of high school athletics and performing arts is not to develop professional athletes but to develop kids, to help kids develop life skills and help them develop relationships. The high school locker room is arguably the last bastion of amateurism within an education-based setting, and we want to protect that.

The purpose of high school athletics is very different from the professional level – and even the college level. High school students can enjoy some success with NIL, but it cannot be done while wearing the school uniform.

And with what has happened at the college level this past year, there are some major concerns about the breakdown of amateur sports – and what the future holds in high schools nationwide.

At the high school level, there is a concern about the absolute breakdown of culture and climate of the high school locker room and the purpose for kids to play high school sports. If high school student-athletes are allowed to wear their Friday Night Lights jerseys to engage in professional contracts, not only are the dynamics of amateurism disrupted, but also the dynamics of a team, the school and the community. You have students earning money because they are a high school student and a pretty good athlete with the jersey on. This is extremely disruptive to the purpose of high school sports.

There is a concern about the breakdown of not just the pathway to education after high school and perhaps participation, but also the breakdown of the very sensitive culture and climate that is amateur high school sports.

We know that adjustments, tweaks and re-thinking of issues are important in our ever-changing world. The NFHS and its member state associations continue to be open to change, but resolute in the belief that high school sports is not about preparing students for the next level of play but preparing students for life.

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.