

An Opportunity to TEACH

It seems like overnight, the focus across the country is not on the COVID-19 pandemic or the restarting of sports. The horrific tragedy in Minneapolis and the ensuing protests in South Carolina and major cities across our nation have resulted in a sobering wake-up call that there are issues that must be addressed as fervently as the development of a vaccine for the novel coronavirus.

These worrisome scenes from across the country and in South Carolina are signs that we have much work to do regarding racial injustice and equality for everyone. Many of the cities here in South Carolina this past week were on national news.

In due time, the national health crisis will subside, businesses hopefully will be able to re-open and people will be able to return to their jobs. But what is the timetable for an end to racial injustice in our nation? If the clashes of this past week do not provide the necessary signal that these issues are more important than anything we have ever faced and could make or break our nation and our state, nothing will.

Sports often provide an escape from the ugly scenes on the news. With high and middle school sports – like most other sports – sidelined during the pandemic, we cannot “escape” the scenes of the past weeks. Perhaps, for the moment, that is a good thing as the nation can collectively focus on one goal.

The goal is to treat everyone the same, treat each other with respect, regardless of the color of one’s skin – the very fundamentals of high school sports in our nation’s schools where all genders, all races, all religions – as in teamwork – work together to accomplish a goal. Nationwide, we have much work to do.

Our hearts are broken at what we have seen and heard these past weeks. Our thoughts, prayers and condolences go out to the families who have lost their loved one in racially motivated tragedies just this year.

We must value the life of every single person in our country, and we must continue to provide opportunities for all people to succeed. Everyone must be a part of the solution, our students, coaches, officials and school administrators who represent these targeted populations. We stand with these groups for positive change. To be crystal clear: We are in support of a strong national voice emphatically calling for Americans to value the life of every single person – and calling for an end to prejudiced, bigotry and any unacceptable behaviors.

Coaches, in my opinion, we have a great opportunity to teach. It is so important that you take the time to have very serious conversations with your athletes. Many of our students can use some lessons and directions on dealing with injustices. I can’t quantify the benefits that will come from such an important discussion. Racism is one of our nation's greatest concerns, however, when it comes to the opportunity that sports provide to bring everyone together these conversations can be life changers.

I believe there is no better national voice than high and middle school sports programs, where opportunities exist for boys and girls of all races, all religions, all levels of ability to work together, to trust each other and to eventually make a difference in our communities and our nation.

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