

Headline: High School Football Playoffs—A Community Happening

By Karissa Niehoff, Executive Director of the National Federation of State High School Associations and Que Tucker, Commissioner of the North Carolina High School Athletic Association.

Many people would agree that their years in high school were some of the best years of their lives—particularly those individuals who were members of a sports team or participated in other activities such as the marching band or debate team.

In many cases, team members become lifelong friends. Reunion parties are held from time to time as teammates return to remember the fun—more so than the outcome of games or events—they had participating in high school activities. Quite often, reunions for sports teams are staged during the highlight of each sports season—the state playoffs.

And as the calendar turns to November, there is nothing like the excitement of high school football playoffs in cities across North Carolina and throughout the nation every Friday night.

While each team will be trying to advance to the state championship, the outcome of the games is only a part of the experience for those individuals in attendance.

Why? Because the people in the stands at high school football playoffs are moms and dads, grandparents, aunts and uncles, sisters and brothers, neighbors down the street, fellow students, and longtime residents of the community. People in the stands know the players on the field. Win or lose, their support and love is always there.

There is no tradition in sports with the history of high school football. There are 30 rivalry games (60 high schools) that started before 1900 and continue today, the longest of which is Connecticut's New London High School and Norwich Free Academy, which have been playing annually since 1875.

In Michigan, Battle Creek Central and Kalamazoo Central have been playing since 1896. In Massachusetts, the Wellesley-Needham Heights rivalry dates to 1882. And in Colorado, Pueblo Central and Pueblo Centennial have been matched since 1892.

Although there are more options for entertainment on a Friday night than ever before, there is still nothing to match high school football playoffs in the fall. With all the people attending games of the 14,247 high schools that play football, expect more than 10 million fans each Friday night—easily the #1 fan base in the country.

As you attend high school football playoff games this year in North Carolina, remember that the players, coaches and game officials deserve your utmost support, encouragement and respect. While advancing in the playoffs is the desire of each team, the ultimate objective of high school sports and activities is to have fun and enjoy these special years.

We urge you to continue to support the high school teams in your community!