

Monday's Commentary

For the kids' sake, reject Cotton proposal

Fat kids make for lazy thinkers.

That's why the Farmington School Board should reject the Cotton proposal for middle school athletics. It would force intramural programs to compete with interscholastics — always a losing battle.

Sports are important in education. But that isn't the case in today's high schools and universities.

We have opted for physically "educating" the elite among our students — all for the sake of having a winning team. In truth this isn't education at all.

America's yearning to see their kids have a shot at an Olympic gold medal, the Super Bowl or the World Series, has diluted our educational system.

A very small minority are the beneficiaries of the best equipment, the most money and time spent for training. Meanwhile, a majority of students are left to languish.

Physical education for all students in high schools is minimal. In many colleges around the nation it's extinct.

The proposal submitted by Farmington Athletic

Director Jack Cotton would further extend this trend into the lower grades.

Under that proposal, an overemphasis would be placed on team competition between schools (interscholastics). A virtual minor league training ground would be developed for senior high school teams.

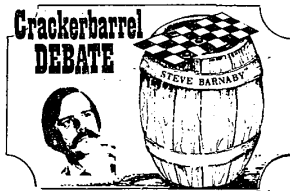
Intramurals, a system which allows everyone to compete, would be pushed into the background. We have seen it time and again in high schools and universities.

In truth, interscholastics are more for the benefit of coaches and parents. They, quite naturally, dedicate their time and money on those sports which bring fame to that school.

Interscholastics give them a vicarious outlet for seeking glory through their children.

But to be a championship school team, to gain notoriety, only the best athletes get the attention.

And that's bad. We sorely need a physical education program in our schools which resists the temptations that come along with interscholastics. We need a system which develops the bodies of all the students.



An alternative does exist for Farmington students but has been rejected by the committee studying middle school sports.

Authored by teacher Sean Whalen, it proposes elimination of all interscholastics and puts the emphasis on intramural programs. Under this plan, each middle school would autonomously decide what activities would be offered.

The Farmington Education Association (FEA) has given some sound reasoning on why the Whalen program should take precedent over Cotton's plan.

Whalen emphasizes returning the enjoyment of the sport from spectator to participant, giving it greater potential for maximum participation.

The intramurals focus more on the development of fundamental skills as well as using these skills in a variety of activities.

Intramurals fail at other schools because they co-exist with interscholastics and are forced to compete for equipment, facilities, personnel and participants.

The FEA newsletter goes on to say: "It has been suggested that the Farmington community won't support an intramurals-only program for middle schools because they would like to see a winner. We believe that the Whalen proposal is a winner—for the children."

It is hoped that the school board takes a good hard look at what Whalen has to offer.

Back to the ballpark

From where you're sitting, the Detroit Tigers played their first 1980 baseball game Saturday. But from where I'm sitting now, the Tigers won't hear the National Anthem for another 24 hours.

Outside the window from where I'm sitting is scattered icy snow. Dead brown leaves still hang on a few trees like limp survivors of winter.

But if the first 1980 Tigers game is tomorrow, I know it's spring. And I hate winter.

As far as Sparky Anderson and Ernie Harwell are concerned, Saturday's game will be meaningless. Especially if the Tigers lose.

Really not much more to it than a bunch of push-ups. The only people sweating in anticipation right now are some rookie pitchers praying to make the team.

And thousands of fans. Like most of the fans, I don't care who wins tomorrow. What I'm waiting for is the sound of hot dogs sizzling in Harwell's voice. I can hear them every year on the first radio broadcast.

This game won't be on television, which makes it even better. The whole stylized business of radio announced baseball games is a sure sign of spring, especially when Harwell is announcing things like "it looks like they just might be gonna make a pitching change."

SPRING TRAINING is all a hoax, of course. Playing baseball is about as exerting as a fast game of badminton.

It didn't used to take baseball players six weeks to get ready to do it, and it probably shouldn't now. But spring training means a month and a half of free publicity to baseball team owners, who are smugly certain that a lot of helpless fans like myself will be slathering with anticipation by the time Opening Day rolls around.

How can you help it? There are so many intangi-



bles to ponder.

Will John Hiller have a heart attack running laps, or will it be Jack Billingham? What untold effect on the Tigers' infield will the replacement of Aurelio Rodriguez by Richie Hebner have? Can Lou Whitaker make fans forget LeFlore? Will the hot dog lady in the bleachers sell me more than two beers at a time this year? Who the hell is Dan Schatzelder, anyway, and how does he spell his name?

And the topic of Mark Fidrych's comebacks, of course, has killed time for more guys over more glasses of tavern beer than any man, woman or child now alive in Detroit.

Baseball has taken a lot of raps in recent years as a slow-paced, sedentary kind of game. But that's precisely the beauty of the sport.

You don't have to be a fanatic to follow it. Miss one week of the NFL and you'll be confused for the rest of the season. You can miss entire months in baseball and when you finally drop back in again, the Tigers will still be looking for just one more pitch. You'll feel right at home.

Outside the window the snow hasn't changed much. The leaves still look dead. My car out in the parking lot has bad brakes. The rent is late.

None of it matters. Baseball starts tomorrow.

Daniel's Den



By Emory Daniels

A child who is different is still loved 'normally'

My son Lyle is an all-American boy in a number of ways.

He's full of energy, mischief and is jam-packed with a curiosity for life.

But Lyle is different from many other 7-year-old boys his age. Lyle is handicapped — a learning disabled child.

The casual onlooker wouldn't know about his handicap because Lyle looks just like any other all-American boy.

A little bit he is, a bit skinny, blond hair, blue eyes, quite a tease, and a smile that immediately telegraphs that all his well in his world.

Lyle is of normal intelligence, and possesses a terrific memory. His handicap has been described as "invisible" because it's not perceptible to the trained eye. Yet it exists in a very real way.

THE FIRST CLUE to the casual observer meeting Lyle for the first time would be a damp area on his shirt, just beneath his chin.

That's caused by the saliva dripping down his chin. Lyle cannot swallow saliva as an automatic reflex response as you and I do. He cannot "feel" the muscles of the lips and tongue as others can. And so he slobbers.

The next clue the casual observer would see would come by watching Lyle "walk." He walks off-balance, leaning forward, and his gait is somewhere between walking and jogging. As a result, he often falls forward.

Lyle has problems with visual perception. Combined with his lack of balance, he often bumps into walls. Almost any week of the year, you will find bruises on his arms, legs or forehead.

At one time, he couldn't close his eyes except when sleeping. The problem was he couldn't close them on command. If you asked Lyle to close his eyes, he'd bury his little fists over his eyes to block out all light. This is because he couldn't "feel" the muscles on his eyelids and, therefore, couldn't voluntarily close them.

Like many learning disabled children, Lyle has problems gripping a pencil or crayon and drawing straight lines or forming letters. Often he will write numbers or letters backwards because that's how his mind sees them. Your mind and mine automatically make a correction.

But he's been in a contained classroom and has received a lot of help from very skilled professionals dedicated to helping young children with problems like Lyle's. As a result, he can write his name, write sentences, and now even read complete stories.

Lyle is especially proud of being able to read, and his mother and I share in that pride. In fact, we might even be prouder because we understand better than Lyle does what a real accomplishment that was.

BUT BEING ABLE to read, even if it's just a little bit, is one small step forward toward an uncertain future.

There have been other small steps too. He now can close his eyes on command, he falls less often, and can walk down the hallway at school without having to place his hands against the wall to maintain balance.

Lyle's mother and I also are proud of those advances, but we still worry about what will happen tomorrow, and the next day, and 20 years from now.

Just last summer, for instance, Lyle was outside playing with the other kids on the block. He never really "saw" the baseball bat the other boy was swinging in a scrub softball game. The bat ripped his forehead wide open — requiring 23 stitches — and left a permanent scar. That incident explains why we worry sometimes.

As the father of a handicapped child I can, of



Lyle is always loved, even though he often is a burden.

course, speak only for myself. I am Lyle's father — no one else is. But being blessed with a son like Lyle certainly has instilled a special understanding of what it's like for a child to be different.

And I would quickly add, without hesitation, that being the father of a handicapped child is a burden. It's an emotional burden to worry whether Lyle will get gashed on the head again by a baseball bat, or run across the street in front of a car, or fall off a bicycle and break his leg.

It's also a financial burden because special needs require special care. Right now I'm paying quite a few bucks a month for private occupational therapy, and about every two or three months there's the cost of a new pair of glasses to replace the ones broken by a fall. And there are other costs.

Lyle also is a burden because he demands more of our attention than does our daughter. His mother and I constantly try to divide our time between Bridgette and Lyle in a way that's fair. But it's tough. And it's also a real burden.

We also are concerned about the future. Will Lyle ever be independent? Will he ever find a vocation to become economically self-sufficient? Will he live with us forever? Will he be a burden for the rest of our lives?

I don't have any trouble talking about my son being a burden. One reason is that he is. I must be honest with myself about that reality to remain mentally healthy and to create a family life and environment to reduce and control the human frustrations we face — so we can, to the extent possible, lessen the burden.

There is no relationship between a child being a burden and a child being loved. I've loved a burden for seven years now and my love will be unchanged, even if he becomes a lifetime burden.

As the father of a child with special needs, I have needed special help to cope with my attitudes, emotions and lifestyle.



discover Michigan

Bill Stockwell

Did you know there is an exciting new science museum on eight acres of land in Detroit's Cultural Center, just north of downtown? The new Detroit Science Center contains 36,250 square feet of exhibits where you are invited to push buttons, pull levers and turn knobs to discover scientific principles for yourself.

from our readers

Reader wants intramural sports

Editor: The proposal to introduce interscholastic athletics in the seventh and eighth grades conflicts abrasively with several facts.

"The goals of middle (junior high) school years with their emphasis upon individual skill development in a social but non-competitive environment.

"The continuing no-frills budget which sustains a basic full program but doesn't allow for fringe additional programs.

"The necessary expense under Title 9 of equal opportunities for girls in all curricular offerings.

"The growth of health education, in all its phases from recreational and leisure time activities to body and reproductive concerns.

"An increased awareness, fueled by court decisions, of the school's responsibility to educate better all the children whatever their handicaps, origins, aspirations and abilities.

On the basis of the facts above, the Cotton proposal should be rejected.

But it also should be defeated because interscholastic sports, which imitate professional teams, lack educational merit and often impede learning programs in the schools.

To impart what is publicized and lionized, if the team is winning, into the

middle schools would contaminate years that should be spent in fun and games. Imposing varsity type competition will reduce the popularity and impact of intramural sports that reach many — and are open to all — students.

School spirit, instead of deriving from homerooms with local, intimate recognition, will come from cross-subdivision rivalries and premature adult antics and excesses.

The vast majority of middle school youths will become spectators before their time and at disadvantage to their own growth, a predictable and unfortunate result of the Cotton proposal.

Perhaps its strongest support comes from those associated with school sports who blantly say that without a sound middle school competitive program under their belts, ninth graders cannot compete equally with youth from parochial and other private schools. This opinion at least makes sense and is convincing if one grants the premise that school programs should be based on intended athletic progress and team success.

I don't, any more than I would expect the notion that schools should fashion curricula to turn out artists or designers or mechanics who can compete successfully with their counterparts in some league of schools.

It is good and worthwhile if achievement is valued and recognized — and especially so if it is received with grace and modesty — but it is self-defeating for public schools to assume the role of publicist, trainer and producer for any job or skill, however popular and acceptable it may be.

I trust that in this instance there will be further review of the intended radical change in the health and physical education program for Farmington youngsters, as first reported (to my knowledge) on Feb. 25, 1980.

For me, in the 32 years of varied experience in the schools, one of the most pernicious trends has been the inculcation of adult values, of dubious quality or outright baseness, into lives of youth.

One effect has been to rob them of their childhood and adolescence in a mad rush to adulthood. Instead of resisting pressures from society, which often have been based on making a fast new buck, the school has been a compliant if not eager partner in this enterprise.

I believe that Farmington children, whatever their level of athletic, or other skill, will be best served by schooling that truly builds character, enough to overcome defeat as well as handle victory.

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