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Promoting Michigan High School Football

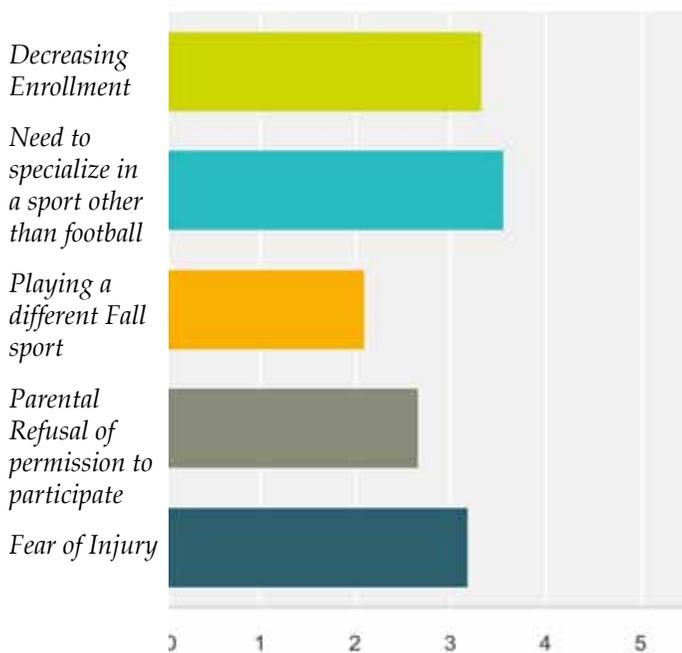
The primary purpose of the Michigan High School Football Coaches Association is to “promote high school football in the State of Michigan”. One of the ways we’re doing this is a project we initiated a couple years ago, an educational outreach to prospective players’ parents.

During the summer of 2015 we kicked off the project with a set of materials under the title, Safer Than Ever, (in partnership with the MHSFCA) explaining how the game: practices, equipment, drills, rules, etc. have changed to make the game safer.

Last fall we did a series of interviews with high school senior players, administrators, and coaches. We asked high school students and football players to think about how their participation in the game had made a difference in their lives/What they’ve learned “about life” by playing the game? We asked high school leaders and coaches and a couple college players to think about how football has made a difference in their life and in their school. The responses, of course varied - greatly - but consistent mention of community and team pride and loyalty, comradeship, improved disci-

pline in the classroom and in life were recorded. These interviews were “un-coached, unedited” and all were included. They are still available at MHSFCA.com. Click on the “Find Us on Facebook” button.

This winter we did an internal survey asking members of our Board of Directors what their observations were about the reasons middle school and high school football numbers are decreasing. The results are below.



The top (perceived) reason for players not continuing to play football while in high school, the “perceived” need to specialize in a sport other than football, is revealing. This is despite ample research (as an example see: <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/the-importance-of-multi-sport-participation>) and statements by major college coaches

about their desire to recruit athletes who have participated in a variety of sports and activities in high school (see: <https://brokenclipboard.wordpress.com/2016/03/13/the-benefit-of-being-a-multi-sport-athlete>). There is still that perception - by many - that specialization will improve opportunities to play at the next level.

The second (perceived) most important reason for decreasing participation, decreasing enroll-

ment, is something we can't control as Michigan's school age population decreases.

To address the fear of injury (which most likely contributes to parental refusal of permission) we have partnered with Dr. Jeffrey Kutcher and the Core Institute to educate our coaches and, in turn, the parents of prospective high school players. Kutcher is a board-certified Sports Neurologist, specializing in sports related concussion and neurological disorders in athletes. Kutcher currently serves as the National Director of The Sports Neurology Clinic at The CORE Institute. (see <https://thesportsneurologyclinic.com/physicians-staff/jeffrey-kutcher>).

Our next step in the process of promoting our sport will be to convene a focus group of parents of middle school and high school students. This is scheduled to get started at the end of June. We hope the focus group will help us identify a "message" that will help to dispel the qualms parents have about allowing their kids to play high school football; that it will help us identify the most efficient method of getting that message out to parents and that it will suggest a creditable messenger.

The first meeting of the focus group is scheduled to happen in Chelsea. We have a core of volunteers for the group - but would like to sign-up a few more parents to participate. If you know someone in the Chelsea/Lansing/Jackson/Ann Arbor area who might be willing to volunteer for this project, please have them contact/or get their names and contact information to: Larry Merx at [LarryMerx@gmail.com](mailto:LarryMerx@gmail.com), 734-604-0765 as soon as possible.