

Tennessee High School Football Coach Writes Perfect Letter on Why Kids Need School and Sports

by [Michael Shamburger](#) 3 days ago 1



Ralph Potter, a high school football coach at McCallie High School in Chattanooga, Tennessee, wrote a moving letter on why high school kids need both school and sports to return.

As a high school teacher and coach of high school students, I'd like to add my voice to the debate concerning reopening schools,

and specifically, for playing sports this fall.

After being back with our football guys for several weeks, I know two things for sure. First, there is a deep, even visceral need among them to return to normalcy. It goes beyond playing a game or getting a formal education; it is a need for communion with one another and with other adults in their lives. Second, there is an absolute willingness to take whatever steps necessary to make a full return possible. None of these guys are unserious about the pandemic. They are anxious to be instructed on what they need to do to protect themselves, their family, and each other.

There is no doubt that this pandemic is real, is an ongoing threat, and is a great tragedy. If we simply look at rates of positive tests and the total number of deaths, the easier answer is to say we should shut down schools and sports until we get a vaccine, but there are high costs to be paid. Too high, I think.

Many of these costs are being talked about frequently. They include mountainous debt, millions suffering in poor countries, significant rises in teenage depression, drug use, and suicide, and loss of academic and social development.

However, these don't describe the whole story. So, I want to share some things closer to home for me; I think most coaches of all sports could describe similar thoughts. I'd like you to know that when a young man goes through a football season, he is at a formative stage. The desire that these guys have to play and succeed, and the investment of emotion, time, and physical effort they put into it, creates an opportunity for deep learning to occur. They go through many unpredictable emotions. They win; they

lose; they become a star; they lose their starting position; they struggle with jealousy, disappointment, elation, and success; they learn to love the people that annoy them. At best, they gain a confidence that can't be described; they know they are responsible; they are able; they can endure. They are given real responsibility. Yes, it is just football, but it is real. They know that what they do or don't do really matters. They begin to understand what we mean by communion, that we are each responsible for one another, that we are not alone, that we are not an island.

This is what goes on every day in our classrooms and playing fields all over our country. You rarely hear about it, because destruction is easier and gets more clicks than construction. But it is there and by it, our society coheres. You can't see it easily when it is taken away. It can't be measured by science, objectively. How can you describe the substance of a void, a hole where a structure should have been? It is said that God is the source of all being, that His love is constantly creating the world, creating us. If that's true, then evil is something like the absence of being, a void, a nothingness where life should have been. That's what this is like. What these young people lose, they will never get back, and the longer this goes on, the more catastrophic the loss becomes.

So, those are the costs that we know, and the price is very high. In this terrible situation in which we find ourselves, those costs must be weighed against the risks, and we must find ways to mitigate those risks as much as possible. We must ask ourselves, "What is the endpoint of this?" Perhaps a vaccine will soon be developed. We don't know that for sure though, and we don't know its

effectiveness either. We have to begin to think of what the world looks like if Covid-19 never goes away. For my part, I do not accept the last three and a half months as a model for what that world will be.

Let the young people be raised and formed. The risk to them is minimal. Protect the most vulnerable. Be creative in our solutions to this.

Please let them go to school. Let them play.

**Ralph Potter
Teacher/Coach
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Well said.

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