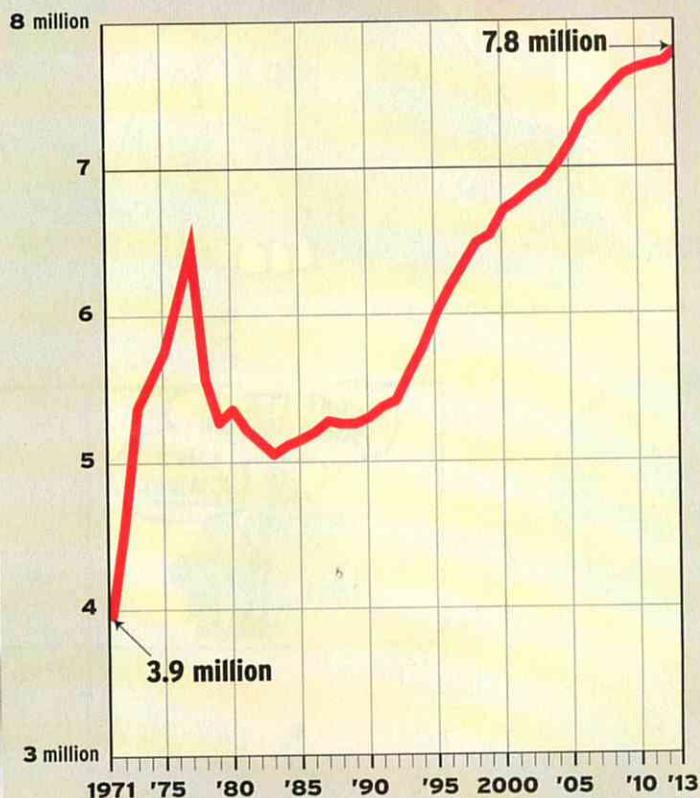# Participation in High School Sports

The number of students playing sports in school has almost doubled since 1971

7.8 million

3.9 million

1971 '75 '80 '85 '90 '95 2000 '05 '10 '13

SOURCE: NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS. YEARS DENOTE THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR; E.G., 1971 REPRESENTS THE 1971-72 ACADEMIC YEAR.

NO Most college students can't remember what they had for lunch three days ago. But ask them for memories of competitive sports they played in high school, and suddenly you'll hear stories about when they pitched for their school baseball or softball team, scored a winning goal in soccer, or made a three-point shot for their basketball squad. That's because sports offer formative and lifelong lessons that stick with people forever.

In fact, research shows that people who played for a varsity high school team tend to donate more time to community service and more money to charities. They also tend to get better jobs, with better pay.

Hiring managers expect former student-athletes to have more self-confidence, more self-respect, and better leadership skills than people who participated in other high school extracurriculars. Studies of people who graduated from high school more than five decades earlier show that those expectations are valid.

> **Former student-athletes tend to get better jobs with better pay.**

While it's certainly true that there's no necessary relationship between youth sports and education, eliminating sports from public high schools would have serious consequences both on and off the playing field. For young people whose families can't afford the cost of participating in private sports programs, it would limit access to an important set of opportunities that schools currently provide. And it would make it harder for them to gain the kinds of experiences that appear to be rewarded later on in the workplace.

Team sports in schools provide clear and robust long-term benefits—to both the individuals who participate and society as a whole. Keeping competitive sports programs in public schools is the best way to make sure they're widely available to all American youth. •

—KEVIN M. KNIFFIN
Assistant Professor and sports researcher,
Cornell University