

Impact of COVID-19 on High School Sport:

Experiences that Can Shape the Future



Presentation to SSBA (April 5, 2022)



Key Questions



What do athletes, teacher-coaches, administrators, parents, and officials say about high school sport?



What were their experiences during the pandemic?



What can we learn from those voices to improve the high school sport experience?

The Team:

USask College of Kinesiology



Karen Chad, Faculty



Louise Humbert, Faculty



Kenzie Friesen, Postdoctorate Fellow

SHSAA Members



Dave Sandomirsky, Executive Director

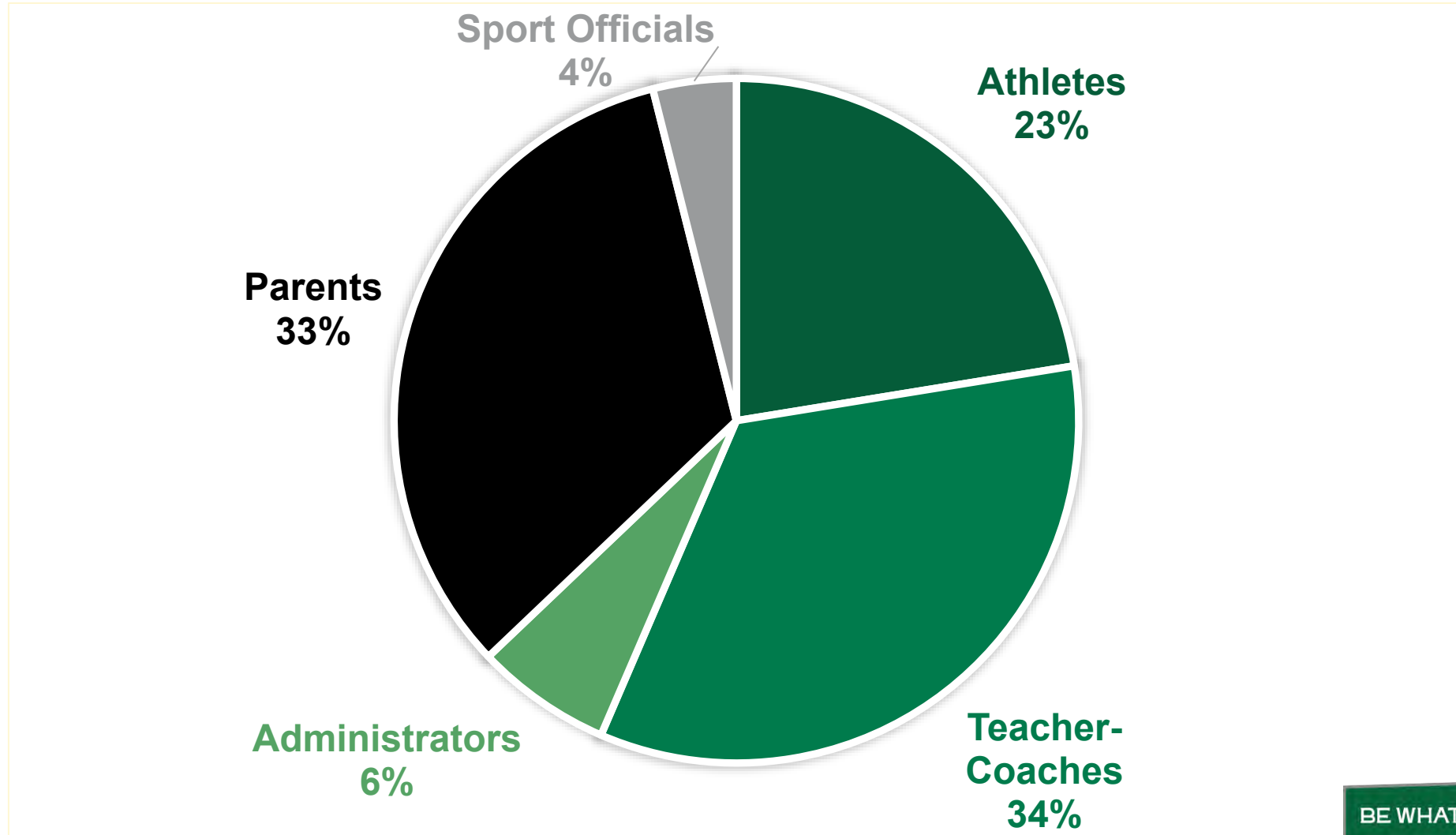


Jeff Kitts, Assistant Executive Director

The Process:

- SurveyMonkey questionnaire distributed across Sask.
 - SHSAA Website
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Instagram
 - Email to School Divisions, First Nations Authorities, and Independent Schools

1222 Participants (June – October 2021)



What We Heard from the Student-Athletes (N = 234)



What are the benefits of high school sport?

- Keeps me active and healthy
- Helps me make friends and teaches me teamwork
- Builds my confidence and self esteem
- Teaches me resiliency
- Helps me feel connected to my school
- Supports my academic learning
- My mental health is better when I get to play school sports
- Gives me a break from the world
- Keeps me focused in school and regulates my emotions

What We Heard from the Teacher-Coaches (N = 355)



Why do you coach?

- To make a worthwhile difference in students' lives
- Enjoyment and love of the sport
- Interaction with students
- To give back

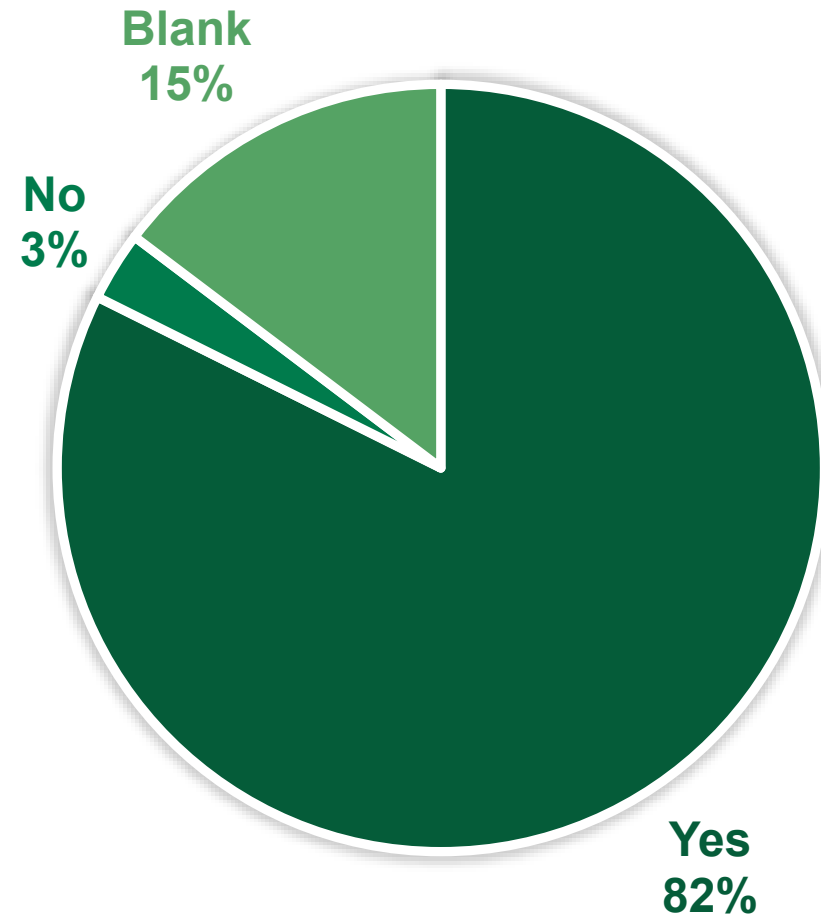
What keeps your fire burning?

- Competition and the competitive environment
- Seeing students grow
- Interaction with students

What We Heard from the Administrators (N = 67)



Were you ever a high school sport coach?



What do you enjoy most as an administrator?

- Involvement with all students and parents
- The administrator-student relationship
- Being an advocate for teachers

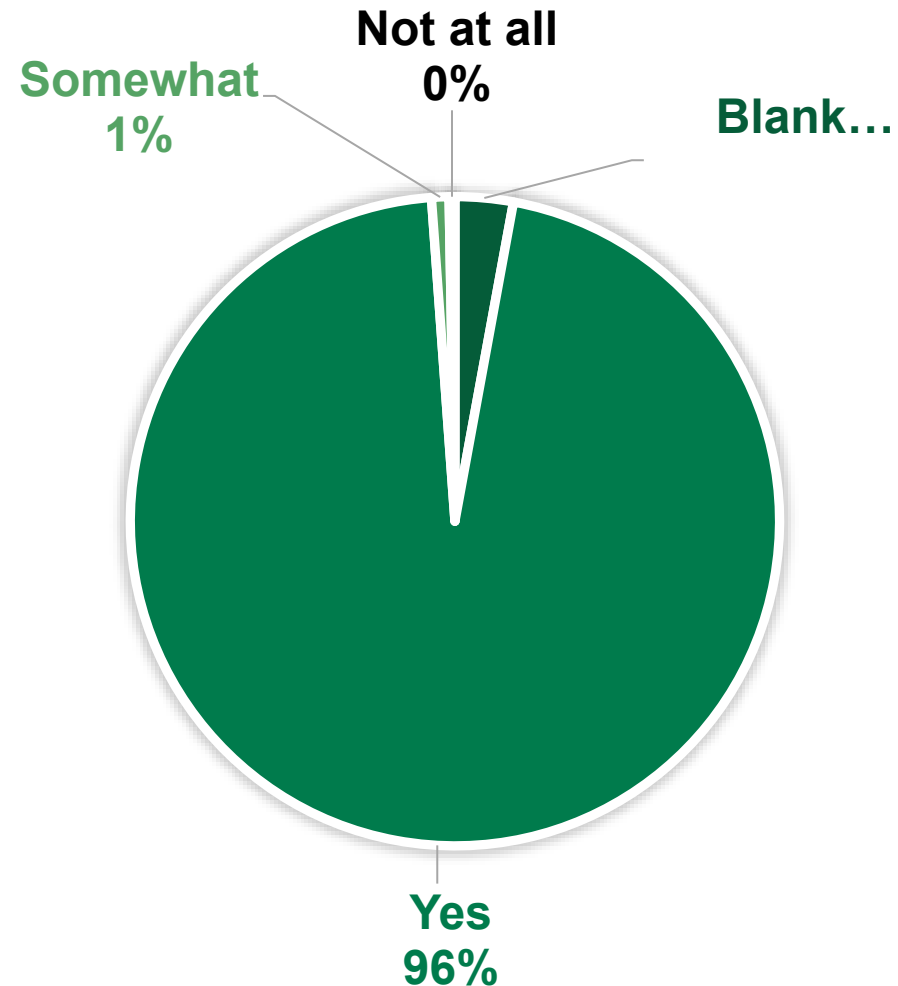
What keeps your fire burning?

- Relationships with students and staff and the desire to constantly make the school better
- Being a leader for change, hope, and advocacy
- Being able to witness the growth in students as athletes and guiding students to develop skills that will assist them in being contributing members of their communities after high school

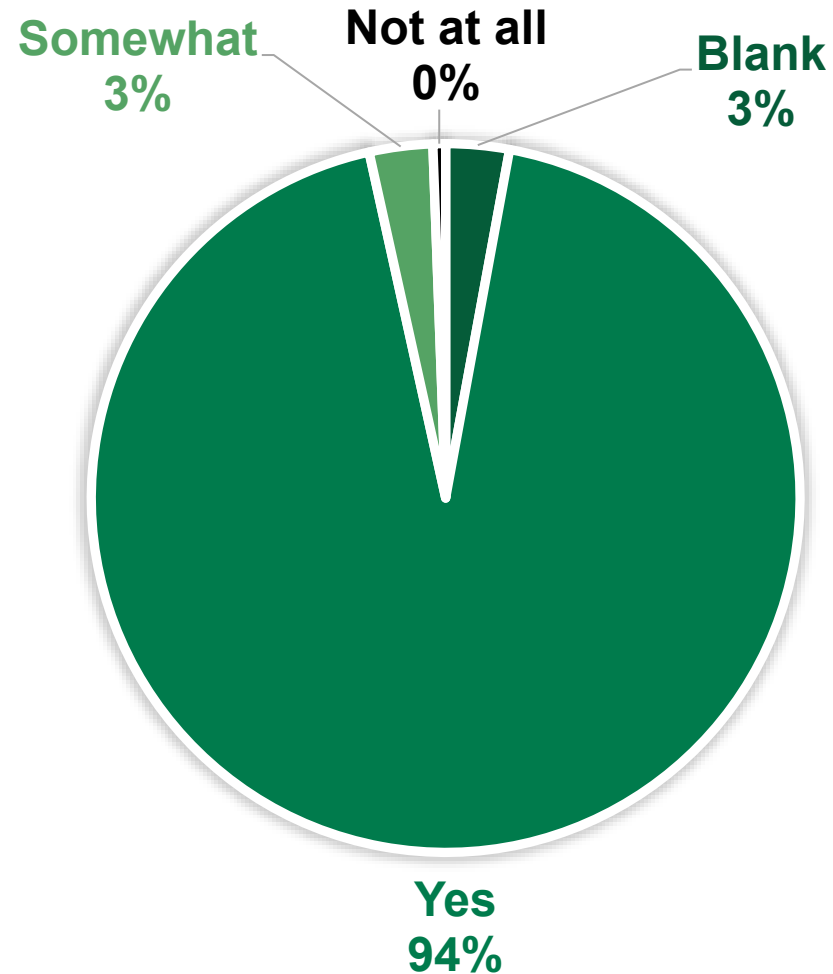
What We Heard from the Parents (N = 346)



Do you think playing on a school sports team is an important and valuable experience for your child(ren)?



Do you believe playing on a high school sports team enriches student academic learning and educational experiences?



What benefits do you think school sport provides to your child(ren)?

- Keeps them active and healthy
- Helps them make friends and teaches teamwork
- Builds their confidence and positive self-perceptions
- Teaches them resiliency
- Helps them feel connected to their school

What We Heard from the Sport Officials (N = 41)



Why did you become an official?

- Enjoyment and love of the sport
- Provide my experience and expertise
- Desire to make a worthwhile difference in students' lives

What keeps your fire burning?

- The love of the game; the desire to stay engaged in high school sports
- Relationships built with coaches/parents/players and other officials
- The enjoyment of helping students learn and excel at sport

What did Everyone Say About Their Experiences this Past Year?



What aspects of high school sports did you miss the most?

31%

- Enjoyment that comes with playing the sport
- A sense of community (with teammates, friends, co-workers, etc.)

10-14%

- Having a purpose outside of school or the job
- Physical activity in a structured setting
- Competitive environment

1%

- School spirit
- Time requirements and responsibilities

What aspects of high school sports did you not miss?

- Time requirements and scheduling constraints
- Risk of injury
- Uncooperative relationships (with teammates, coaches, parents, etc.)

During this past year, instead of high school sport, what did you do? What did you not do?

- Athletes
 - Got a part-time job
 - Worked out; got a gym membership
 - My mental health suffered
- All Participants
 - Very little physical activity; I was so bored
- Teacher-Coaches, Parents
 - Spent more time with family
- Parents
 - Had children do some private training; played club sports

Looking Ahead: What We Heard



Athletes: If you had one message, what would it be?

- Let us go back to school sports the way it was before COVID
- Sport is extremely important - not having it was hard on our mental health
- Sports help us through so much and boosts our mood
 - We need to be active to be healthy
 - I have felt lost without sports
- School sports were my outlet from academics and my home life. It was an easy and effective way to help get rid of stress and find enjoyment.
- Sport brings a higher involvement between kids and their school that did not happen last year
- In a big school, there are only the competitive teams, no recreation teams. It would be good if all kids who wanted to play could.

Administrators: How do you feel the pandemic will influence high school sport in the year or years ahead?

- Concern about decrease in participation rates by volunteer coaches
- Concern about student mental health and well-being and how that will influence their ability to fully commit when returning to sport
- More attention given to procedures and how we do things
- Increase in injuries because of the decrease in physical activity
- Schools will have to start the process of engagement again

Administrators: What suggestions do you have that would encourage teachers to get or remain involved & engaged?

- Reiterate the benefits of the relationships built with students through sport
- Do an SHSAA Ad campaign: Constant, powerful reminders of how important school sports are to the students
- Reconnect with students in areas they are passionate about
- Highlight the importance of opportunity to connect with kids, parents and communities
- Divisions should consider offering more earned hours to extra curricula; better compensation for time put into extra-curricular while maintaining a full-time job
- Provide teachers time to coach

Teacher-coaches, administrators, parents, and officials:

If you had a blank slate and could design the high school sport experience as we return from the COVID-19 pandemic, what would you include?

- High school sport needs to go back to the way it was before the pandemic
- Better communication between administration, students, parents and parent volunteers
- Equal funding; consideration for all sports
- More time devoted to development due to the extended absence of sport
- Opportunities for a variety sports, a chance to learn skills but not require too much time commitment. Also compensating teacher coaches for their time.
- Simple renewal process for community coaches who coach yearly

Summary: What We've Learned

The impact of the pandemic was a reminder of the importance of high school sports:

- Improves the student-teacher relationship
- Emphasizes the importance of friendship and teamwork
- Develops citizenship skills like resiliency, time management, etc.
- Connects students with their school
- Keeps students active and healthy
- Enriches student academic learning and educational experiences
- Is necessary for students' positive mental health and well-being

Summary: What We've Learned

- Increase promotion and advocacy of the benefits of high school sport
- Be creative, innovative, & equitable in engaging-supporting administrators, teacher-coaches, & officials involved in high school sport
- Enhance communication between administration, students, parents and parent volunteers
- More time devoted to skill development and injury prevention (due to the extended absence of sport)
- Re-engage with school sport (coaches, students, and officials)
- Enhance support for students' mental health and well-being

Some actions and next steps:

- Survey results were shared with the 14 districts across the province
- To do:
 - a) Present and share the overall project widely
 - b) Conduct follow-up interviews
 - Dive deeper into areas of interest (e.g., sports and academics)
 - c) Reflect and look to implement what we heard and learned
 - d) Do another survey that looks at this past year
 - e) Connect with post-secondary institutions
 - What messages are they giving re teachers and extra-curricular activities