

WEARING MASKS

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tect himself or herself and more about the added safety those masks provide for everyone else around them who may be affected by an illness. Using the most recent pandemic as an example, COVID didn't pose much of a fatal threat to young people, nor did it pose much of a fatal threat to those with a good immune system; however, a large number of people with some form of health issue could be greatly or gravely affected by it. As a result, masks helped keep at-risk people safe. When more people wear masks, the people around them have less to worry about when it comes to getting sick.

Some people dislike masks due to the obvious inconveniences they lead to. For example, wearing masks may make it difficult for some people to breathe. Additionally, mask wearing may make social interactions more difficult. However, these issues may be less important than the fact that masks provide protection and comfort to other people who can rest assured with the knowledge that they are safer. Being sick isn't enjoyable even if the illness isn't critical or life-threatening. If asked to make a choice between losing a day or more of school or work due to an avoidable sickness and wearing a mask, the right choice seems obvious.

In the end, I believe that masks are extremely beneficial and their use should be highly advised if not fully mandatory. Encouraging the use of masks with heavy incentives will increase people's use of them without making them feel they're losing their rights. It is important to remember that, even before the pandemic, mask wearing was common at places where people are facing health risks, such as hospitals or retirement homes. I suggest everyone really think about mask wearing as a health issue and not just a public rights issue. I think most people would conclude that mask wearing is not bad and the people who claim it is may not be thinking logically.

PARKING COSTS

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a free pass.

"If you're having any type of hardship such as a fire or transportation issues, you can go talk to an administrator, then they will talk to me and will figure something out," she said.

According to students, the cost of parking passes has an impact on their decision to drive to school. Peyton Sanders (12) said he feels like the passes are overpriced.

"They are already \$170 at the start of the school year, but I think it should be \$50 because some students don't have \$170 to give at once," he said.

Personal Learning Coach Mr. Sanders said that the district's transportation issues are also having an impact on students' decisions about driving to school.

"Not having enough buses and the buses often being late should be reasons to bring the price down," he said.

Rucker said she would like to start some events for a chance to get some free parking passes for students. One of her ideas is to have students put into a drawing for a daily pass. Additionally, another idea is that, if a student has a 3.0 GPA or higher at a midquarter, the end of a quarter or the end of the semester, they could get at least a week off from paying for parking.

ROBOTICS SQUAD

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Our son participated on the Nordic ski team and robotics at the same time. We have had several students since then who have been involved in other school activities and jobs and still participate in robotics, so it is possible," Coutts said.

Participation in robotics can also be of help when applying to and seeking scholarships for college.

"Through FIRST and their business and collegiate partners, there is over \$80 million of scholarship monies available to students who participate in the FIRST Robotics competition. Many top-tier colleges and universities have recognized the value of FIRST and have included FIRST participation as part of their application process," Coutts said.

Students who are interested in learning more about the group and joining are encouraged to visit Ms. Thurston in the Activities Office.

"We allow student to join at any time of the year," Coutts said. "No prior experience is necessary."

Athletes try to balance school, sports

Coaches and players agree that the challenges of doing a sport can have a positive impact on a student's academic performance



Photo by BRIGHT DEKU

The later end of the school day has meant that athletes have even less time in the evening to do homework.

By NOAH PLAHN
Quill staff writer

Cooper has many students taking part in sports, but this comes with the responsibility of finding the balance between athletics and academics.

One coach who has seen the importance of this balance is Mr. Connors, who works with football, basketball and track athletes. Connors said he always pushes academics first.

"For us, the biggest thing is academics. We always push academics first because, without academics, our players are not eligible to participate, so as long as we have that aligned and they're handling their business in the classroom, then that makes it easier for us to trust them and makes it easy for them to be coachable on the field. With that set in stone, we know they are committed and they are on top of things and that leads to how we want things to go on the field," he said.

According to Connors, there are various rules with grades and attendance that athletes are expected to follow.

"If they don't handle things in the classroom, then they probably won't be put in a starting role within the program. As far as academics or attendance goes, students who are missing practice won't be allowed to play in the games, and for varsity guys, if they were in starting roles but missed practice or school and that's

not excused, then that will push them down the depth chart. They have to be committed and show up every day so everyone is responsible for their position," he said.

While finding a balance between school and sports is difficult, Connors said the benefits of athletics are overwhelmingly positive.

"For me, I say sports shapes your life. It creates discipline and structure, especially if they don't have that outside of school. My biggest thing is community, building a family with our network, and using football as a platform. It extends their brotherhood beyond their own house, and as they grow older, they tend to lean on one another and support one another. They also build bridges through other communities. For example, one of our coaches, he's into building homes. Now, we have three of four of our former athletes that are into architecture, construction and business management within his business of work," Connors said.

For people trying to find a balance with everything going on in life, Connors explained that having a routine is important.

"You have to find a routine first and foremost. A routine is everything, and once you fall into a routine, it becomes a habit and that habit becomes a lifestyle. As a former student-athlete myself, I've been through all of that,"

he said.

Agreeing with Connors on many issues related to balancing academics and athletics is Nordic ski coach Ms. Hoffman. She said there are many ways she influences both academics and athletics with her players.

"I tried to always reiterate to my athletes that they are student-athletes and being a student always comes first. I'm lucky to have many of my athletes in class, so I'm able to closely monitor their academic performance," she said.

Hoffman said she puts an emphasis on attendance and grades when it comes to her athletes.

"Grades and attendance are so important to academic success at Cooper. If you are not in class, you are not learning. It's important to be on time and be ready to be a student. My rules were that you needed to be passing your classes to be able to participate in practices and meets. We had some dedicated study time on certain days for practice to ensure that all of our Hawks had time to get their work done," she said.

As a coach, Hoffman said she has often seen how athletics can help people not only academically but in life in general.

"I think one of the biggest effects of being a part of athletics is that you are part of a team. You have a group of people around you to hold you accountable and to be an extension of your family.

It's important to feel like you are a part of something that is bigger than yourself to grow as a student, an athlete and a human being," she said.

When it comes to the advice she gives her skiers about finding a balance between personal life, school and athletics, she said that organization is key.

"Get a planner and map out what your time will look like. Try to plan when will you have time to complete homework, work your job and attend practices," she said.

When it comes to Cooper's athletes, captain of the girls soccer team Marin Scherber (11) said she tries to influence her teammates to strike a healthy balance between academics and athletics.

"I really work with them and let them know I'm here to help them with soccer and school. If they need to take a day to work on school or even mental health in general, that's okay. Soccer isn't their main and only point in life," she said.

Scherber said academics are especially important for those players who may be considering taking part in soccer at the college level.

"You can't get into college if you're not doing well in school. Enjoying the luxury of college sports comes with making sure your doing well academically," she said.

Although athletics can take up a lot of a player's time, there are definite benefits to being in sports for one's success in school and life.

"It can definitely be stressful to know that you have multiple places to be. Also, sports are an after-school activity, so every single day have to find the balance between homework, schoolwork and putting in your training. However, if you take it seriously and have a plan, you can make it work," she said.

Scherber added that playing a sport can provide a much-needed release from the stress of the school day.

"I think definitely going to soccer every day, I don't ever feel sad. If I'm having a bad day and I go to soccer and see my teammates, I definitely feel happier and it gives me some peace of mind," she said.

As a student-athlete, Scherber said she has some advice on how to find a balance between her many responsibilities.

"I almost discipline myself in a way every day. I get home from practice and I tell myself, 'I'm going to finish this assignment and then I'm going to take a shower.' It's almost like a rewards system," she said.

Jaxon Howard prepares for Division One football

Over the last six months, the veteran Hawk athlete committed to LSU, signed with agency for NIL

By NEMO PONDER
Quill staff writer

Many Cooper students have played sports at a level that got them recruited by college teams. The most recent example of this can be seen with Jaxon Howard (12). At the end of his junior year, Howard committed to play football for the Louisiana State University (LSU) Tigers, a Division One (D1) program. Along with that, he was also the first high school athlete in Minnesota to sign a name, image, likeness (NIL) deal with an agency under the new NCAA guidelines.

Howard said that his college recruitment process over the years was pretty straightforward.

"I picked up my college recruitment pretty quickly actually. I got my first scholarship offer my freshman year in November. After that, everything ramped up for me, especially during COVID times when everything else kind of broke down. Coaches really got to being more online and what I did was just make a lot of workout videos of me doing drills outside on the field or me lifting weights in the weight room. I was just making quick little snippets, tagging them on Twitter or sending them to Twitter and that's how I got out to everybody," he said.

Howard explained that it was mentally and physically hard getting to the D1 level for football.

"The biggest thing that I did was figuring out things I wasn't doing correctly and being able to fix and improve them. A lot of things when it comes to playing as a D1 athlete is knowing that you are not going to have everything right. When you are able to learn and develop correctly, you are going to be

able to figure out problems with your game and be able to grow from that," Howard said.

Now that he is set on LSU, Howard said he has some goals he wants to achieve as he starts with that team.

"My next step is to get playing time. It doesn't matter where I play, but first, I'm definitely going to start with special teams. I want to get that starting spot at the Jack position, which is defensive end and linebacker combined. I know I'm going to have to work for it. I know there are some other guys coming in with me that are going to be competing for that spot," Howard said.

Howard said competing for spots on the team will be of benefit to him and his teammates.

"I think with that, not only is that going to make me strive more and be better, it also is going to help the team be better. With that said, I really just want to do the best I can for my team and try to get on the field as quickly as possible. Even if that means me playing an offensive position and going on the line to block for some plays, it really doesn't matter. I'm just ready to play ball," he said.

In addition to his decision to join LSU, Howard also signed with a NIL agency. NIL stands for name, image and likeness. On July 1, 2021, the NCAA implemented a policy allowing all incoming and current student athletes the opportunity to earn money from NIL deals. Howard said he was excited to sign with an agency.

"It felt really good, partially because they have such a good history with the athletes they have signed. I met Adam Thielen when he helped create our weight room. I found out he is part of the agency I have signed with.

I also have CJ Ham in that agency, too, which is also really cool because we have something we are collaborating with in the future. Really, the best thing about it is just collaborating with different people around the world. I'm not really doing it for the money aspect either; I'm really just doing it for my brand in the future and helping people out in different communities," he said.

Howard wasn't the only person going through this process. His dad, Cooper activities director and head football coach Mr. Howard, was right there with him helping him get through the process because he also was once in his son's shoes.

"As a parent the, expectation is to help guide them through the process," Mr. Howard said. "Being that I've been through the process as a student athlete, I was making sure I didn't bring my biases in. But I liked being able to help Jaxon with any questions he might have."

Mr. Howard explained that he had a completely different recruitment process than his son.

"My recruitment process was different because of the technology. Twenty-six years ago, the only time you could get offers is if you went to football camps or if college coaches came to your games and watched you play. Another way was taking VHS tapes to the college coaches or having your high school coach send it to them, and if they did have interest in you, they would write your name down in a booklet. Now, there is Hudl, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and other social media platforms, which allows more exposure and more opportunities," Mr. Howard said.

While the decision-making pro-

cess was tough, Mr. Howard said he was proud that his son chose LSU on his own.

"He called the coach to let him know. They had a talk and Jaxon told him he was committing. He didn't tell me first because he didn't know, but I was really proud of him for making this really tough decision," Mr. Howard said.

Mr. Howard also helped advise his son through the NIL process. Mr. Howard thinks the NIL deal will be beneficial.

"Jaxon has come from a different cloth of mentality. It's never been about himself, so I always make sure he does things the right way. He did this so he can help people and collaborate with people that want to help him help the community. He also wants to build on top of his brand, which I think is a great opportunity for him," Mr. Howard said.

Also accompanying Jaxon Howard during his college recruiting and NIL process has been his Hawks football teammates. One person who has worked with Howard over the last four years is Corey DeLoach, Jr. (12). DeLoach said he is excited for Howard but was not expecting LSU to be his top choice.

"I was very much surprised because I thought he was going to go to Miami. I had on Miami attire that day and he went with LSU, but I'm proud of my teammate," DeLoach said.

DeLoach added that it has been a rewarding experience playing with Howard over the last four years.

"It feels great that he helps the team get more exposure and he really brings that fire towards the team. Being able to play with one of the best players in Minnesota is truly amazing," DeLoach said.