

SPORTS COMMENTARY

The key to winning? Put all sports on equal footing.

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Illustration by Ella Hughes

Every Friday during the fall, students crowd around the Great Lawn to watch pep rallies, and while the captains of each fall sport pass around the mic to let spectators know when and where they will be competing that weekend, it is understood that most students will only be attending the football game.

Since the Kinkaid Game on Nov. 1, there has not been another pep rally.

Once the hype of Kinkaid Week died down after another disappointing loss, the field hockey and girls volleyball teams went out and beat the Falcons – not that many noticed.

At the SPC Championship meet in Dallas, sophomore Sarah Spalding was standing atop the starting block for the first heat in the 50-meter freestyle when she looked out in the stands. Not a single student spectator was in sight.

Studies have shown that having loud fans can have a positive effect on individual performance. In Spalding's case, an active student section gives her a motivational "adrenaline rush." She concedes that having friends and classmates in attendance would also bring greater recognition to the sport.

"I feel like swimming is really underappreciated for how difficult and time-consuming it can be," Spalding said.

For the few fans who are interested in how the swim team fared at a meet, results are not even posted on the SJS Athletics Instagram page. Meanwhile, other team sports get their scores posted regularly.

ATHLETIC UNSUPPORTERS

Sophomore Samuel Caruso has been running both cross country and track since middle school. During the fall season, he races nearly every Saturday morning in faraway places like Austin or The Woodlands.

"It is running, so I don't blame students for not coming," Caruso said. "If I wasn't a runner, I wouldn't really care." Caruso still enjoys the competition, but he does so for himself – with a

lot of support from head coach Richie Mercado.

"Our coach always tells us that at meets we're not going to have too much support from others," Caruso said. "We have to perform for ourselves."

Caruso notes that because attendance at the meets is mostly parents, it is important for teammates to cheer for each other. "Just saying Good Luck is good enough."

READY FOR PRIME TIME

For teams fortunate enough to play on campus, there are still significant discrepancies in attendance between genders. Even when sports do not share the same field, the boys still get the prime start time.

During the winter, the girls basketball team always plays first, usually about 5 p.m, while the boys tip off around 7.

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SAMUEL CARUSO

At the girls games, parents often outnumber students.

"It's just dead," junior captain Valentina Doss said.

If students do show up to watch the girls, they often stumble into the gym in the fourth quarter when the game has already been decided. On some occasions, the sudden influx of fans alters the pace of the game and creates added pressure for female athletes.

By the time the boys begin, the student section is packed with fans all dressed in the theme of the night. And on Friday nights, Liu Court is full.

While members of the girls team might wish that fans would show up from the player introductions until the final buzzer, that's an unreasonable expectation unless the girls teams get the prime time start – maybe just once, like

for Senior Night.

Female athletes understand that their classmates are busy and generally only like to attend games that are worth watching, like those against Kinkaid or Episcopal, but that doesn't mean they should be ignored the rest of the season.

FINDING EQUAL FOOTING

The reality is, all sports deserve recognition and should be valued equally.

Whether the sport is girls or boys, individual or team, athletes work hard and strive for excellence, which should be acknowledged. Athletes are devoted to competing regardless of their sport, yet only some receive proper recognition.

"Everyone's doing their part, everyone's training hard, everyone's working hard, everyone's doing their best," Spalding said.

Although there are discrepancies between different sports, standards are slowly improving. Cheerleaders now show up to support teams other than football. The Spirit Club Instagram strives to promote more sports teams. With the help of members of the St. John's community, athletes of all sports can finally get the recognition they appropriately deserve.

In 1972, Title IX mandated that there should be equal opportunities between counterpart sports, yet this only applies to universities and colleges and does not necessarily affect high school athletics.

Powerful female athletes like Caitlin Clark and Serena Williams have proven that people will watch women's sports. Other athletes that play more individual sports also continue to strive and provide interesting competition to watch.

For real change to happen, there needs to be more pep rallies, Instagram coverage and promotion of team spirit within the school community for every team, regardless of season. Awareness should be brought to all sports, not just the teams that are popular or successful.

In high school, parents should never be the only system of support at a meet or competition.

