October 19, 2021

Hello Nighthawk Fans,

As we approach the final portion of the fall high school sports season, the end of the fall middle school season, and await the start of winter sports, I want to send a few reminders to all the fans.

First things first, I thank everyone for the support of our teams. We have a great fanbase, and #NighthawkProud is a real thing. The pride our community shows in the school and the students is truly unmatched by the surrounding communities. As a district, we work hard to do what is right for our students and athletes, working to keep them safe and healthy at all times.

Speaking as a school administrator, I can tell you most assuredly that NONE of us, no matter what school we are from, take pleasure in enforcing the mandates. WIAA guidelines state that fans are supposed to have masks on at all times while watching an event. At home events, we have made masks available, and nearly all fans have shown us their masks as they enter the gym, however, we have not walked the gym and enforced the true rule that masks be worn.

As we have traveled for away games, we have found that each school has their own philosophy on the enforcement of the mask mandates for fans. Some handle it as we do, others not so. What is important for us as Oakesdale fans is to be respectful of the rules and enforcement of the hosting school.

We will find as we travel to other areas of the state, whether it be for regular season play, or tournaments, that the mandates will be more tightly enforced. In some schools, games will not begin until the fans are all masked; games will be stopped if fans are not masked; and fans can and will be removed from gyms for refusal to wear the masks. While this may seem ridiculous to some, and not to others, following the rules of the home site also falls under sportsmanship and we as visitors need to be respectful of the rules of the host site.

Many fans in the last year (starting in last year’s abbreviated season, and into this year) have had much to say about game scheduling. Days and times of contests have been questioned. There is one basic reason. There is a shortage of officials and this shortage has everything to do with the behavior of fans. Oakesdale has three community members who also serve as officials, and each has attested to this fact. Unfortunately, last year, Oakesdale gained a reputation for not being a place officials wanted to be; this is a new reputation for us.

There is a reality to fan behavior and its impact on a game. First and foremost, fans are at games to watch the game and pay attention to the players. It is understood that games cannot be watched without seeing what the officials are doing, however, our purpose in the gym is to watch the game...watch the kids compete. It is understood that the actions of the officials affect the game. It is very easy for any of us watching to have plenty to say about the calls made; however, none of us watching are on the floor, in the game, in the moment, as the officials are. And, like with all of us in all we do, sometimes we get it right, sometimes we do not. Officiating a game is no different.

In my 14 years in Oakesdale, I have had to remove two fans from the stands during basketball games; neither were from Oakesdale. Last year was the first time for me to be called to the floor by an official because of the behavior of our own crowd. This is not the image we want for our school.

There are real consequences that affect the teams when it comes to the behaviors of fans; behaviors such as yelling/berating officials, foul language, not wearing masks, arguing with the game administrators, or not leaving when requested by an official/game administrator. Those consequences can include penalties/fouls, game delays, removal from the gym; or the end result can be that the game can end and the team whose fans are the issue will forfeit. If a behavior is too serious, fans can be banned from games, home and/or away.

It is understood that times are stressful. Many are stressed about COVID itself. Others are stressed about the mandates because they don’t agree with them; others agree with the mandates and are stressed because others don’t follow them. There is nothing easy about it.

School events, though, can and should be a place to come for entertainment, to watch our kids do great things, to watch our kids be successful, and to watch our kids work hard. School events are an opportunity for community gathering, and in the case of Oakesdale home events, have some great food while you are at it.

All games, home or away, provide these opportunities. The student athletes are doing their part by demonstrating sportsmanship throughout their games; if they don’t, they should be called on it. The same goes for the adults. Let’s keep our focus on why we are at the games. To watch and support the kids.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jake Dingman

Superintendent of Schools

**Winter Coats are available to any and all students who want or need one.** Coats are hanging on a rack outside the office. Just take the one you (your child) want.

Coats are available from a donation by the Knights of Columbus.