



Commissioner's

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Comments

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Keeping the flame of excitement burning

The 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio have come to a close, and what an Olympics it was for the United States!

The U.S. won medals of all colors, but in particular we won gold after gold. An American won the gold in the 1500-m run for the first time since 1908. Winning a medal, no matter the place it represents, is an incredible achievement and great honor.

During the Rio games, we saw athletes displaying way more than their athleticism. They also showed an incredible dedication, respect and love of their countries. Yes, some exhibited embarrassing behavior, but far more represented their individual countries well. Many winners shed tears on the medal stand during their national anthem. U.S. pole vaulter, Sam Kendricks, stopped in an attempt to clear the bar in order to stand at attention for our national anthem. And even Usain Bolt, the Jamaican sprinter and fastest man in history, stopped an interview out of respect for the playing of the Star Spangled Banner. It is heartening to know that through the Olympics, every couple of years, the world can come together and people of different nations can forget their respective differences.

Still, this year's games are over. In some ways, I am glad – I am a complete Olympic junkie. It did not matter what the event was, I was going to watch it. Now that the last lap has been run, the last shot put thrown and the last floor exercise completed, it means I can sleep again. However, it also means we are back to "normal." How will we handle that? Do we just forget the games happened? How long will the "glow" of the games continue?

As I was watching the closing ceremonies, the focus turned to the future and the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. As I watched this, I couldn't help but think of our schools. The "glow" of opening day and the excitement of our new students was bright, and maybe still is for some. But invariably, as we get into the school year, that opening day "glow" will begin to dim. The flame of enthusiasm for a new school year burning inside our students and teachers may flicker and eventually be extinguished as the routine of homework, grading, teaching and learning sets in.

Our educators have a very difficult job, but I am going to challenge us, and I mean all of us including me, to remember the excitement from the beginning of the year. I am also going to challenge us to focus on the future as they did in Rio. Our future is a little different, it is not four years from now. It is this year. It is the focus on keeping excitement on learning and not on the stuff that can make our jobs feel like a job and not the honor that it is.

Finally, as we go through our year, I believe we will have a banner year in terms of our achievements. Those achievements do not come without three critical things in my opinion. First, no achievement comes without hard work. Second, no achievement comes without commitment and focus. Third and equally as important, no achievement comes without the competitor (or educators and students in this case) being able to visualize their own success. If they cannot see themselves doing it, they will not be able to do it. We cannot let ourselves be so encumbered by everything else going on that we lose sight of the fact that all students can learn and we can teach them. We must continue to have high expectations for all.

So, have a great year. I am looking forward to working together to improve our system of education in Kentucky.