

# NFHS corporate sponsorship story

By Lauren Oosterlinck

With a shortage of funding for athletics on state and local levels, many schools and school districts around the nation facing budget deficits are raising money for their athletic departments by entering into corporate sponsorship agreements that involve naming rights. This trend has become more prevalent at many high schools, whether it be by posting a corporate sign on a new football stadium or by sponsoring an entire athletic complex.

Big corporate names have been involved in such sponsorship deals. Without these deals, many schools would not be able to continue to maintain their programs.

"I think they (naming rights agreements) will occur more often, and I think the public is not opposed to them, as the public realizes the growing expenses of school sports," said Steve Hurst, athletic director of Noblesville (Indiana) High School, where the football field was recently renamed after a local Chevrolet dealer.

Mike Wilson, associate superintendent of Topeka (Kansas) United School District 501, agrees. Three years ago, a local family funded a sports park for the Topeka school district.

"I think these naming opportunities are a sign of the times and will continue," Wilson said. "Because of limited funding for schools, school districts are always looking for alternative sources of revenue."

The following are just a few instances in which schools have made corporate sponsorship and naming rights agreements.

### **Noblesville (Indiana) High School**

This past August, the football field at Noblesville High School was renamed Hare Chevrolet Field as the result of a \$125,000 naming rights deal made with the local Chevrolet dealer.

The naming rights deal is for 10 years, and gives Hare Chevrolet the option to renew at the end of the deal. Among the deal's provisions, Hare gets its name on a sign atop the football field scoreboard and on the pressbox.

According to Hurst, negotiations with Hare on the project began in early April, construction workers broke ground on the project in May and renovations were done by late July.

Noblesville High School was able to have its first home game on the field August 25, when they held a dedication ceremony and announced the official renaming of the field.

"Our community is very proud of it," Hurst said.

The school is getting its money's worth out of the field. Not only is the new field being used for high school activities, but the elementary school football league (of 800 students) is scheduled to play there, as well as some travel teams. The Noblesville Middle School also uses the field for home games, and some soccer games will be played on it. In addition, the band practices on it.

"I think they (naming rights and corporate sponsorships) are a positive thing to do if you have a designated project (such as a new turf field)," Hurst said. "We do not have corporate sponsors listed in our gyms or fields just for the sake of raising money. We have used corporate sponsors for specific projects."

Contributions to the project have also been made by private local donors. They held a telethon on a local television station in April, which raised more than \$500,000 of the \$575,000 needed for the project.

### **Sumner (Washington) School District**

Ray Sparling and Jerry Yoder, owners of Sumner (Washington) Sunset Chevy, jumped at the opportunity to buy naming rights to the Sumner School District Stadium.

The district was forced into this decision in the fall of 2005, due to the fact that Sumner had to share its stadium with the new Bonney Lake (Washington) High School, which would started playing its home games at the stadium, formerly known as Sumner Stadium.

In order to outbid the competition, Sparling offered the school district \$504,000 for naming rights. The district then announced its decision to select Sunset Chevy as its sponsor in last December.

The contract is to be spread over 14 years at a rate of \$36,000 a year. In return, Sunset Chevy gains naming rights to the stadium, now named Sunset Chevy Stadium. The contract also includes a new scoreboard with the name Sunset Stadium. In addition, the name will appear on the side of the stadium that faces Sumner's Main Street, on a

donor wall at the street entrance, in home game and event programs, and on the district's Web site.

According to Donald Eismann, superintendent of the Sumner School District, the money received will help pay for the planned stadium remodeling and will free up money that can now be spent on educational programs.

In addition to spending more than \$5,000 on the sponsorship project, Sunset Chevy donated a car valued at around \$30,000, to be raffled by the school each year. The car will be parked in a prominent locale at the stadium during events. Half of the money raised from the raffle will be put toward the dealership's annual sponsorship contract, and the other half will go toward activities that benefit all students, according to Eismann. However, full details have not been completely determined.

Ten percent of Chevy's annual donation, approximately \$3,600 a year, will go to the Sumner/Bonney Lake Education Fund as an annual scholarship for students intending to pursue higher education in the automotive field.

"We want to spoil someone else," said Yoder, who began his automotive career cleaning cars at the dealership he currently owns. Sparling and he want to help students who, like themselves, are interested in the automotive industry and are in need of scholarships based on academic success.

Sunset Chevy donated vehicles and motors to the school district before the sponsorship deal even came into being. Sparling and Yoder just want to support the school and its students.

"It's nothing new for us. We've supported these kids for years and years," Sparling said. Yoder's father graduated from Sumner High School in 1931, Yoder himself graduated in 1964, his daughter is a 1999 graduate and his son will graduate next year.

### **Topeka (Kansas) USD 501**

More than three years ago, corporate sponsorship agreements started for Hummer Sports Park during construction of the park.

The \$350,000-plus sponsorship agreement for the park, funded by local family Dana and Louise Hummer, entails naming rights of various venues at the Park, as well as exclusive signage at the Park. A local bank will receive exclusive signage on all scoreboards in return for paying the district more than \$300,000. Another local bank gets naming rights to the natatorium for \$250,000. Other local businesses can pledge \$50,000 for smaller signs located at all concession stands. Friends of other local celebrities have pledged between \$50,000 and \$100,000 to have names associated with the two baseball and two softball diamonds. In addition, other people and corporations that contribute to the Park endowment fund get a place on their "Wall of Fame."

All deals with the district are for a 10-year period, except for signs at the concession stands, which are for five years. Names on the "Wall of Fame" are permanent.

These deals came about because of direct talks between central office administrators and representatives of the families and corporations.

"They (the sponsorship deals) have been received very well by students, staff and patrons of the school district," Wilson said. "We are trying to appeal to any corporation that is willing to invest in our school districts."

The target audience with these deals is students, family and fans who attend their sporting events. Wilson adds that for that reason, they would not deal with any corporation that represents tobacco, alcohol, adult entertainment or any other questionable types of businesses.

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