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High school sports participation up Participation increases for 19th consecutive year

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INDIANAPOLIS -- For the 19th consecutive year, the number of student participants in high school athletics increased in 2007-08, according to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS). Based on figures from the 50 state high school athletic/activity associations, plus the District of Columbia, that are members of the NFHS, participation for the 2007-08 school year set an all-time high of 7,429,381, according to the 2007-08 High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the NFHS.

In addition, boys and girls participation figures reached all-time highs, with 3,057,266 girls and 4,372,115 boys participating in 2007-08. The girls figure surpassed the total of 3,021,807 set last year, while the boys figure eclipsed the former record of 4,367,442 set in 1977-78. Through the survey, it was also determined that 54.8 percent of students enrolled in high schools participate in athletics.

"This is certainly another great report on the interest of high school sports in our nation's schools," said NFHS Executive Director Robert F. Kanaby. "The fact that we experienced all-time records for both girls and boys reflects the fact that the high school sports participation experience is more viable than ever and is of great interest to our nation's young people. In addition, the results support the NFHS 2008-2011 Strategic Plan, in which the organization committed to providing stronger leadership and support for high school athletics and fine arts activities."

Two years ago, the NFHS began a new brand identity emphasis using a communications tag line of "Take Part. Get Set for Life." In addition to its chief task of writing playing rules for high school sports, the NFHS is striving to gain awareness and support from state and local governments, media, corporate partners, and especially students and their parents.

Competitive spirit squads gained the most female participants in 2007-08 with 16,130, followed by soccer with 8,913 and cross country with 6,973.

Lacrosse gained the most participants among boys sports in 2007-08 with 11,336, followed by soccer with 5,562, swimming and diving with 5,158 and cross country with 5,042.

In terms of combined participation, the emerging sports of bowling and lacrosse continued their rise in popularity with significant percentage increases. Overall participation in bowling increased 17 percent, while lacrosse participation was up 14 percent.

Basketball remained the most popular sport for girls with 449,450 participants, followed by outdoor track and field (447,520), volleyball (397,968), fast pitch softball (371,293), soccer (346,545), cross country (190,349), tennis (172,455), swimming and diving (147,197), competitive spirit squads (111,307) and golf (69,243).

In boys sports, 11-player football once again topped the list with 1,108,286 participants, followed by basketball (552,935), outdoor track and field (548,821), baseball (478,029), soccer (383,561), wrestling (259,688), cross country (221,109), golf (159,958), tennis (156,285) and swimming and diving (111,896).

Texas held its title as having the most sports participants with 779,049, followed by California (735,497), New York (380,870), Ohio (346,571), Illinois (336,646), Michigan (315,734), Pennsylvania (286,992), New Jersey (256,837), Minnesota (230,068) and Florida (227,157).

The participation survey has been compiled since 1971 by the NFHS through numbers it receives from its member associations. The complete 2007-08 Participation Survey is available on the NFHS Web site.