

# Spirit slump

By Jessica Green

Student participation at basketball has been 'embarrassing'

**E**mpty student sections, little support and all the time left on the clock leaves athletes looking to others for encouragement.

Over the past two years, students have said that attendance at games has decreased. Senior Jason Mohr, who goes to athletic events regularly, said he's angry and frustrated at the low game attendance.

"The athletes just aren't as pumped up anymore because no one goes," he said.

Mohr, senior Lucas Larkin, junior Blake Davison and sophomore Drew Johnson were the only four to attend the boys and girls basketball games Jan. 10 at Newton.

"Lucas and I are always loud," Mohr said. "We were the only four there and yelled the whole time."

Senior Ryan Hall, football and basketball player, knows first-hand about the small student section. He said students have spirit; it just comes in spurts. He hopes it will improve in the years to come.

"We're there to represent Maize High, but the students aren't there to represent us," Hall said. "It's a two-way thing, ya know?"

Hall isn't the only one to notice the bare student sections. Senior Katelyn Winn, co-president of Red Rage, said school spirit has taken a turn for the worse.

"It's embarrassing," she said. "We're at our own school and can't even compete with other schools' student sections."

Senior Allie Carleton, another regular game attendee, said, "Our school spirit is weak, but the people who have it are awesome. The people that have it have a lot of it."

Mohr, Larkin, Carleton, Winn and junior Mikala Sharlow estimated that

about 30 to 60 students attend home basketball games; however, Larkin said he's only seen about 10 to 20 at away games.

Basketball isn't the only sport where spirit is lacking. Other sports, such as volleyball, soccer and tennis, have undergone the spirit slump.

Sharlow was the only student to attend the state volleyball tournament this past fall, and she wishes more people would go.

"I love the action of sports," she said. "The volleyball girls make some crazy hits, and they have really good teamwork."

Senior Dan Keltz, football player and swimmer, said school spirit might be declining because those who are passionate about sports went to Maize South or are already on the court, leaving the stands bare.

"I wish everyone would come out and watch a sport," Keltz said. "I wish they had to stop selling tickets because it was so full."

Junior Gabby Ybarra, basketball and soccer player, has had similar feelings about opposing student sections. Ybarra acknowledged her jealousy of other schools due to their overwhelming student sections.

"It makes you wish that our student section was as good as theirs," she said. "Other schools, like Andover Central and some of the Kansas City teams we play, are more organized and do different stuff every game."

Ybarra said that during the basketball game against Goddard Eisenhower Jan. 6, she was in a mix of emotions between mad and disappointed. If students from other schools are willing to drive to MHS, why can't students who live in the area come out too, she asked.



Senior Zach Gawlik is a student who doesn't attend games. He said he is more interested in academics than athletics. He also said that even though athletes want people to go and watch, they might not even notice.

"I just don't want to go," he said.

Gawlik said that free food after a few games might get him to go, but it isn't likely. The usual incentives, such as free T-shirts and hoodies, aren't getting very far with Gawlik, either.

"I just don't like sports," Gawlik said. "They're boring, and I don't care if we win or lose."

Eric Wolgast, MHS athletic director, said a vibrant student section can play a part in which high school eighth-graders prefer to attend next year.

"It definitely has an impact," he said. "If they come to our events, then it's a pull to come for athletics next year. I just hope that they would come for our academics as well. With such a great program, we have a lot to offer."



JESSICA GREEN

Wolgast said school spirit is better than last year. He gives Dana Handy, Red Rage sponsor, a lot of credit. "She's done a good job at improving the attendance at athletic events," Wolgast said.

While improving the school spirit this year seems far off, Carleton and Hall have been thinking of ways to increase game attendance, such as halftime competitions, free food after the game, free student nights and more opportunities for free T-shirts. Wolgast said some of the best incentives have been free athletes passes, free T-shirts and free hoodies from Red Rage.

"People are missing the typical high school experience," Hall said. "It's almost backwards in a way. If I was in the student section and watched my team lose every night, I wouldn't be motivated to go either. But those fans that show up all the time... I love those fans. I feel like they think they're not too cool for school — those people are just there to have fun." ■



JESSICA GREEN

**ABOVE:** The student section on Feb. 10 had one of the better turnouts this season. The Lady Eagles defeated Derby 65-53. "The attendance was a lot better," senior Hunter Wilson said. "It might be because of homecoming and everything, but people need to cheer louder and we need to come together as a school."

**LEFT:** During the final moments of the boys basketball game against Derby on Feb. 10, students raised their hands during free throw shots. "The spirit was really good at that game compared to others, maybe because the score was so close," senior Lucas Larkin said.