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Why was Newton South athletics picked No. 1 by Sports Illustrated?

Posted July 10, 2009 10:00 AM

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By Matt Rocheleau and Ben Terris
Globe Correspondents

Sports Illustrated editor and writer for high school sports Kevin Armstrong said he chose Newton South High School as the top athletics program in the state for its running program's achievements and consistency.

The year-round process to determine the state's top athletic programs consisted of looking at Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association statistics, determining the level of competition for each school and interviewing coaches, athletics directors and fans throughout the state, Armstrong said. SI ranked the top school programs in each state.

"We want firsthand information. We don't just look at the broadsheets or just at a school's reputation," said the 25-year-old Boston College alumnus who toured South's athletic facilities earlier this year.

The ranking was reported by Boston.com/Newton earlier this week.

This is the third year Sports Illustrated has ranked the top program in each state. And, Armstrong who has helped compile the list in each of the three years, said he doubted South's Lions would have even been in the state's top five programs in the previous two years.

"Obviously, [South's] track program, as well as cross country, were excellent," said Armstrong, who worked parttime in the Boston Globe sports department while in college. "That kind of consistency stood out."

Armstrong said in determining a school's overall athletic ranking, a sport's popularity is not a chief factor.

Sports like football, baseball, basketball or hockey, "get most of the attention," he said, but "track and cross-country are right up there with participation."

According to the website, the top schools were determined by "sifting through state tournament results for the 2008-09 school year, contacting athletic directors from top programs, examining all-around success rates as well as weighing the importance of producing star athletes and teams that excelled on a national level."

The recognition came as a surprise for some, as Newton South did not field particularly noteworthy teams in the big three high school sports: baseball, football, and basketball. Baseball went 9-11 this year, football 4-7, and boys basketball just managed to finish above .500 at 10-9. But South's track and volleyball programs apparently made up for it.

"I'm surprised that Sports Illustrated picked us, but not because I don't think we deserved it," said Tom Haskin, the former editor in chief of the student paper, The Lion's Roar, and player on the baseball team. "It all stems from our incredible running teams."

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Newton South excelled in its running and volleyball programs in the spring, with girls' track winning the Division 1 title and finishing second at the All-State meet, boys' track finishing seventh in the division and seventh at the All-State meet, and volleyball losing in the state semifinals.

Likewise, last fall the girls' cross country team won the Division 1 title while the boys finished seventh, and in the winter girls' track tied Mansfield High for the all-state title and won the Division 1 meet.

The Sports Illustrated rankings indicated that other notable Bay State programs included Boston College High School's and St. John's Preparatory of Danvers.

Coaches and athletic directors who were interviewed for the rankings did so under the assumption that their names and comments would not be made public, said Armstrong. This was done so they could speak openly and give fair assessments about competing programs, he said.

Besides visiting South, Armstrong said he attended athletic events in the state from time-to-time, including track and field events at the Reggie Lewis Track and Athletic Center in Roxbury and a basketball tournament in Springfield. He also recalled attending a B.C. High football game this year.

Armstrong said he chose the programs for about 20 to 25 states on the national list, including the top schools in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. The online list was posted to the magazine's website, SI.com, on Monday, July 6.

On a national level, Armstrong said Massachusetts' top high school athletic programs would place in the middle if ranked against the other states' programs. Sports Illustrated only ranks the top 10 programs nationally. Punahou in Honolulu, Hawaii ranked first nationally. South did not make the top 10.

Armstrong grew up in Nanuet, N.Y. and went to high school in New Jersey. He graduated from Boston College in 2006 where he covered sports for the college's newspaper, The Heights. He also worked for the New York Post's sports section before joining Sports Illustrated nearly three years ago.

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32 COMMENTS SO FAR...

1. wow that's pathetic! the guy must not have looked at many other schools

Posted by newtonlion July 10, 09 12:24 PM

2. This whole system of ranking interscholastic athletics programs -- including the Globe's -- contravenes the very philosophy of sports at this level, placing the won-loss record on the highest pedestal. Check the MIAA's mission statement and see if it is consistent with these ranking systems.

Posted by Mike Rosenberg July 10, 09 01:42 PM

3. Hey guys, it is not just about boys football, basketball and baseball. Girls sports are just as important. And, there is more than just a good track team at South. The South girls soccer team and girls volleyball team were among the best in the state last year. The girls basketball team went to the semi-finals in the state tournament. South kids personify the best qualities of student athletes. They are smart kids who are also committed athletes and are consistently recognized for their sportsmanship. The sports program has good leadership from an energetic AD, a top notch field house and a new field complex under construction. South plays in probably the toughest league in the state. Success is not just about won-loss records.

Posted by Lions Fan July 10, 09 01:45 PM

4. Shocked but proud!! South's athletic program's reputation just got a great boost

Posted by jeff in waban July 10, 09 01:47 PM

5. S-T-E-V-E-M-C-C-H-E-S-N-E-Y

Posted by Atwood July 10, 09 02:12 PM

6. That is a joke.....I went to CM, and I would even say that BC High has to have the best athletics in the State. I understand that there are no girls that go there so it may not be fair. Although you can penalize the achievements made by those students athletes because of the schools enrollment policy. At the same time everyone knows Newton North would just about crush South across the board. I smell fix in this article.

Posted by Scott July 10, 09 03:40 PM

7. I'll bet our boys/girls hockey programs could kick Punahou's ;-)
These rankings are um, just a little subjective.

Posted by peterj July 10, 09 03:53 PM

8. so if bc high wins the 2008 baseball state championship, and the 2008 football super bowl, and the 2009 winter track states, and finishes top 5 in swimming, and wins the 2009 baseball state championship, and finishes top 5 in spring track, and had a high jumper who is one of 3 in the country to jump over 7 feet, they don't get to be number 1 in the state. they're at least top 10.

Posted by Jake of quincy July 10, 09 04:07 PM

9. I'm kind of shocked that some people want to throw cold water on this wonderful award ! The track team at South is totally outstanding. I as a parent, and sideline fan of many other sports, have found this team to be like no other. And adding to the strengths of this team, there is a very devoted parent-organization involved, to boot! All the right ingredients for a highly successful team.

Posted by Anonymous July 10, 09 04:07 PM

10. We all know that St. John's Prep is the best, this guy going to a couple of games doesn't mean he knows squat about Mass High Shool Athletics

Posted by Eagles Fan July 10, 09 04:22 PM

11. Typical BC homer..... must have skipped the schools that are good at sports

Posted by gob July 10, 09 04:22 PM

12. Newton South over Boston College High School?

This year, BC High won state championships in football, baseball (both Div1), and sailing. Swimming finished fourth at the state championship meet and won South Central Sectional championship. Student Athlete Bill Kiley was featured in Sports Illustrated 's Faces in the Crowd section for his athletic prowess.

But chosing South over BC High for their track and field program? Did no one tell Armstrong that BC High won the state relays for winter track AND spring track? And has he ever heard of Corey Thomas?
Come on.

Posted by Paddy July 10, 09 05:22 PM

13. To base so much on the success of a school's track team is unjust. Obviously the same athletes that are good runners during fall, are also good runners during winter's indoor track, and then again during spring's outdoor track. Find me a school with a different group of runners each season that wins three championships, and I'll bow down to them anytime. Granted Newton South's other teams may be doing well for now, but I'm still not convinced they're the best in the state. In fact if I was a student from Newton South, I'd be embarrassed to have been ranked number one in MA.

Posted by A non-believer July 10, 09 06:10 PM

14. When there's some debate whether you even picked a TOWN's best program, you know there's issues.

Clearly, BC High is the call, but the no girls factor sunk them.

But if SI really wanted to pick something unconventional, then Amherst Regional would have been the way to go with its national prominence in ultimate frisbee. The rest of their "big" sports are usually as equally mediocre as Newton South.

Posted by Gruff But Unloveable July 10, 09 09:03 PM

15. I would not want to be a football player for NSHS next season.

Posted by concerned NSHS trainer July 11, 09 11:28 AM

16. Well, well, well, so many experts doing so little homework. I understand our New England Sports mentally is a little narrow minded but I'm glad to see SI is not afraid to look beyond what we in NE think! Sorry BC and STP but you don't have to deal with the reality of a public school. Facilities, Recruiting, Girls, Alumni, Money, Special coaching (wink,wink) I could go on but I don't have the time.

Lets get back to Newton South and few facts that I was able to find:

14 of 26 programs were in the top 10 in the state.

7 of 14 were top 4 in the State.

Please note Golf, Wrestling, Girls Volleyball, Girls Tennis, Boys Tennis, Ski ,Girls Basketball, Boys Cross Country, and Girls Cross Country contributed to success of this Award along with the noted Boys Volleyball, Boys Indoor Track, Girls Indoor Track, Boys Outdoor Track & Field, and Girls Outdoor Track & Field.

*Note I believe South had more ALL AMERICANS than any other HS in Mass. I realize that some athletes repeat in different sports season but that takes another season of full training and new competition.

In the State of MA the league records are not the best test for a true champion. The level of competition from league to league is very different. The DCL is the toughest league to play in period. Please look at all the STATE results from all SPORTS BOYS and GIRLS Combined! (sorry BC, SJP)

PS We should be happy that a national Media outlet is willing to publish any HS sports rankings even if we don't agree.

Posted by MA coach for past 24 yrs. July 13, 09 09:56 PM

17. in response to the above post..

if you are saying you think public school student athletes have more to deal with, then I'm afraid you are dead wrong. BCH and the Prep are top tier academic schools, and the workload their students have to do deal with make going to Newton South look like a fun little game. If students in public schools had to deal with the same workload, you would be seeing lots of academic suspensions.

BCH

Football- D1 Superbowl champs. 2nd straight championship in by far the toughest football conf. in the state.

Basketball- Conf. Champs for 11th straight year

Winter Track - D1 State champs

Swimming- SS champs.

Lax- Lost to eventual champ Dux in the final four by 1 goal.

Baseball- Second straight straight champ. 3rd straight south sectional

Spring Track- 2nd in state tourney

Sailing- 2nd state straight champs.

8 sports where BCH has a decisive edge over Newton South.

Newton South has an edge in- Girls sports and Cross country.

Please don't ever say again that Dual County is the toughest league. It is in no way even close to the Catholic Conf.

CC is the best conference in

Hockey Baseball Football Lacrosse Swimming and Track

Posted by just plain wrong July 14, 09 10:56 AM

18. In response to the above reply. If you take the time to review the sheer volume of facts you would understand what is being said. You are missing a lot of information.

Heres a hint: ALL SPORTS BOYS AND GIRLS COMBINED PLUS ALL AMERICANS = DCL POWER!

Have a great sumer! peace out!

Posted by Do your homework! July 14, 09 01:04 PM

19. I've got to agree with just plain wrong.

The DCL doesn't measure up to the Catholic Conference in a single sport. If you review the "shear volume" of facts then it would become even more

apparent that the Catholic Conference is the best conference in the state, and the DCL should be grateful to be considered for second place. A very distant second place I might add.

Tell me why I shouldn't think the DCL is completely inferior, and use your "facts" to back it up.

Posted by youmustbemistaken July 14, 09 07:36 PM

20. South? this whole article basis it off how track and croos country are so popular at South? Now maybe im biased but North has not lost in track in over 11 years indoors and out. I also was a football captain at north and was a big fallower of other sports and i would have to say that most sports are close with the obvious sligt edge to North. there was definately some biased in the article, i am not even trying to say that newton south or north is the best i would go with Brockton personally maybe BC high if you rule out girls sports, but North owns south and north isnt the best trust me. someone needs to be slapped for choosing south

Posted by NNHS Athletic Alum July 15, 09 11:58 AM

21. Hell yeah STEVE MCCHESENEY!!!
FTD!!!!!! That guy impacted my entire life. What a coach and person!

Posted by Anonymous July 15, 09 09:58 PM

22. After looking at several of these blogs there are a lot of people OFF SUBJECT with their responses. STATE and NATIONAL results were the initial criteria. Best athletic program for the 2008-2009 season ONLY. We need to throw out league, conference championships (all leagues are not created equally) and result from previous years. I know BC might be the best Boys Athletic program but I believe the Newton South Girls out match their accomplish on their own with student who live in their own town. Private school need their own Division because they recruit from all over and don't have to deal with Title IX.. I believe the Globe has a several awards based on the best winning % based on regular season records. Most of the comments need to wait on the Globes Awards in the Fall. Once Again SI was looking at State and National results. Lets talk about who competed at the National level first then talk about State comp later . NS Girls XC #6 in the Country to start. Is there a football team in MASS 2008 ranked in the top 100? Maybe MASS Football, Basketball, LaX, and Baseball should stat playing some CA, Texas, or FLA team so they could break the top 100 in the Nation. SI is a national magazine that understands some teams will compete at a National level and other will only be State or Sectional Champions. Hope this info helps everyone stay on track with their blogs. I know the good old boys are so sad to see Girls Sports lifting an Athletic Program to a National Award but times are changing.

Posted by Lion Pride! July 15, 09 11:49 PM

23. no not all conferences are equal the Catholic Conf is by far the best.. why does town matter at all? If anything that should add to the respect of students who have to juggle a greater workload and a greater commute. MIAA schools don't recruit. Unless you have solid proof we can all see, don't even bring it up.

Pre-season rankings mean absolutely nothing. The NS girls XC didn't even win states. You want a national athlete? How about Corey Thomas, one of the best track athletes in America this year, or one 15+ athletes who received offers from D1 colleges for sports. (5 seniors committed 10+ underclassmen received interest)

BCH baseball broke the top 100, football I believe was in the 200s.

Newton South won ONE state championship with girls and boys sports combined.

State Title Contenders

Newton South (boys and girls sports)- 1 championship, 1 more contender
BCH (only boys)- 4 state championships, 3 more contenders.

Unless the judge puts a MUCH higher premium on the less popular women's sports then on men's sports, then there is just no way that this can be justified.

Posted by stillno July 16, 09 10:58 AM

24. This shows that public schools are getting better at sports in general. NSHS

has a great all around athletic program. Another program that deserves attention is Walpole, they may not be the best, but they might deserve a most improved award. Everyone here goes on and on about the CC and how great it is. I'm not saying that it isn't good, it is one of the best in the state, ONE OF. As in there are more conferences that just as good or better. Oh Scott, Newton Public Schools actually have outstanding academics. I'm sure the NSHS kids could do fine academically at any CC school.

Posted by public getting strong. July 16, 09 12:42 PM

25. This is an award that the Newton South track and cross country (and volleyball this year) teams can enjoy. The rest of the teams in the program are just hopping along for the ride and are a joke..... just another giant thumbs up for that happy go-lucky Newton South community.... more cake and candy for the hard working 25% of the student athletes at South..... "Oh, they won 2 games this year..... but the kids had a GREAT time and learned SOO much" a direct quote from a sugar coating Newton South parent, which seems like the norm over there. Either that or they are calling AD Scott Perrin about their child's playing time, 22 times a day.

Posted by Pete July 17, 09 12:14 AM

26. Newton South 2008-09 Information:

Girls XC # 6 at NATIONALS , ALL STATE Champs with lowest score in history., DIV. 1 Champs as well.
Girls VB Sectional Finalist Div. 1 East (State trophy)
Boys Golf Div. 1 North Champions (state trophy)
Boys XC top 10 in the entire STATE
Girls Soccer Ties National ranked AB and Strong tourney showing.
Girls Indoor Track & Field ALL STATE CHAMPS, Div. 1 Champs, *National Champ relay team.
Boys Indoor Track & Field * Top 7 in the entire State.
Girls Basketball reaches Semi-Finals in State tourney
Boys Wrestling Div. 1 Central East Sectional Finalist (State trophy)
Boys Volleyball Div. 1 South Champions (# 2 team in entire state by 1pt.)
Girls Outdoor Track & Field Dominate Div. 1 Championship meet, #2 in ALL State Meet *National Relay Champs
Boys Outdoor Track & Field top 7 in State (National Relay team # 11)
Boys Tennis Top 10 in the State
Girls Tennis Top 10 in the State
16 ALL-AMERICANS HONORS
PS National and State info for the 2008-09 season only!
If your into league or conference awards wait until the Fall Boston Globe Awards.
SHOW ME THE MONEY!!!

Posted by Just the facts please! July 17, 09 07:53 AM

27. Ok, congrats you have an awesome girls cross country team, and a good vball team, those have both been discussed ad nauseum by the NS supporters.

Boys Golf- BCH D1 South champions. finished 2nd in state tourney (NS was 5th)
edge BCH
Boys XC- NS 3rd in tourney, BCH 13. edge NS
Boys Indoor Track- BCH state champs. Edge BCH
Boys Vball- who cares? honestly does anybody care? edge NS by default
Boys outdoor track- 2nd in state tourney. edge BCH
Tennis- NS lost in the first round, BCH made it to the quarter finals. Edge BCH

Football, basketball, hockey, baseball, lacrosse, sailing, crew, all MASSIVE edge BCH.

The girls sports were pretty good, but for them to counterbalance the God-awfulness of the boys sports they would have had to have been truly dominant.

The article above is about why Newton South was chosen for this honor despite being terrible in all the popular sports, if there were in fact 16 All Americans from Newton South don't you think they would have mentioned it?

Consider the money shown.

Posted by letslookobjectively July 17, 09 08:25 PM

28. If this is public schools it is Duxbury HANDS DOWN. If you include the private schools then yes BCH.

Posted by Chad July 21, 09 09:16 AM

29. I completely agree with #20. I am a graduate from Newton North, i was an 8 season varsity member of the track and field program, and i played soccer all four years as well. the problem with picking South is that they aren't even the best athletic program in NEWTON not to mention all of Massachusetts. I can affirm the fact that North track hasn't lost a meet indoors or outdoors in 11 years. and the meets weren't even close. while i was there wed win meets by scores of 95-8 on a regular basis, and from what i understand the track program as well as the dominant cross country team we had while i was there, continues to get better.

Comparing south to north would be easier if they played in the same league too. North has been consistently dominant in track, XC, soccer, baseball, lacrosse, gymnastics, swimming (they have all their meets on the road too), basically everything besides football. and that is in the bay state league, the hands down strongest athletic conference in MA. South plays in a creampuff league with every hyphenated named team in the state. North would destroy south in any sport if they played one another. but they dont, which i always found sad.

im not making the case for NNHS to be the top program, but south cant be the top program if they are #2 in newton.

GO TIGERS!!!!!!!!!!!!

Posted by FORMER TIGER SPRINTER July 21, 09 06:46 PM

30. I certainly agree with Chad (28) ! Although, DHS was not as successful in X-C and Track and Field, how about the THREE STATE Championships and numerous Patriot League Championships this past year??? Also, the #1 Sailing Team in New England and national ranking? All due respect to NSHS but.....?

Posted by Nick74 July 22, 09 11:36 AM

31. best public school programs (in no order)

Andover
Brockton
Duxbury

But Prep is head and shoulders above all of them, and BCH is head and shoulders above the Prep.

In what boys sport is the Bay State League better then the Catholic Conference?

They might compete for best public conference, but don't kid yourself, the Catholic Conference is the premier conference in the state.

Posted by bostonsports July 22, 09 03:55 PM

32. I go to South, and while it certainly invokes a lot of pride to be named #1, it certainly isn't right. Let me start by saying that the track teams, specifically the girls', are simply otherworldly. With all due respect, I think that no matter what league we were in, the girls' track/XC team would not be beaten. However, other than that, there is no great program. Tennis, boys' volleyball, and gold are all very good. Baseball, basketball, and football are all improved but nothing special. Practically everything else is a joke. Maybe they considered mock trial? Anyway, even if we DID deserve it (and I do think no girls did BCH in), it doesn't feel right. Athletics take a very clear back seat in this school and I haven't been compelled with school spirit enough to attend a single event in my life. If the teams keep improving, then maybe I will. That's what I hope the new principal will bring. Anyway, I wish that this award was sort of a culmination of a transformation into a big athletics school, because I still feel inferior to North even. Perrin sucks, the coaches (besides pretty much only McChesney) suck, and this will get to their heads. I hate it. I think this will turn us downhill, honestly, falsely acknowledging any progress that has been made, effectively erasing it. So it is quite the honor, but all I ask is why?

Also, please leave us alone. We didn't ask for this to happen (well, obviously someone inside did, but still). No need to bash the school for something a national publication named its athletic program. Yes, by the way, I do hate it here sometimes and many of you are correct about the rich, pampered, elitist

attitude of families around here and I can't stand a lot of it. It's been that way my whole life so I'm used to it. Yes, our academics are exceptional and I doubt that a BC High curriculum would fail the students. But, that has nothing to do with sports. The students are mostly nice people and the athletes are mostly very committed students as well. I, and other students/alumni, willingly admit that this was most undeserved, so please don't bash us all to hell. Thanks.

Posted by South Student July 24, 09 03:24 AM

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