

**8<sup>th</sup> Grade Basketball**  
**By: Chris Thomas**  
**For EFSLSports.com**

There is no doubt about it, I am a huge sports fan. Football, hockey, basketball, soccer, curling--if it has two teams plus a scoring system that determines a winner and a loser, then I am a fan. What helps to fuel my love of sports is the fact that I live in one of the greatest sports cities in the world--Chicago, Illinois.

Home to the Bears (NFL), the Bulls (NBA), the Cubs and Sox (MLB), the Blackhawks (NHL) and the Fire (MLS), Chicago has it all. And these are only the professional teams. I'm not even mentioning the several minor league teams in the area.

Recently, I was lucky enough to be able to attend three sporting events over a period of four days. First I was in attendance at the Chicago Blackhawks vs. Detroit Red Wings at the United Center. These two teams have been bitter rivals since the early 1900's, and the games always prove to be exciting.

Second, I went back to my old grade school to watch the 7-8th grade boys basketball team play. St. John's-LaGrange vs. Concord-Addison.

Third, I was lucky enough to score a ticket to the Chicago Bears vs. Minnesota Vikings at the new Soldier Field, where Bears rookie quarterback Rex Grossman made his debut.

At this point, you might be asking yourself why I included the second game, an 8th grade basketball game, among the other two professional sporting events. Well, honestly because it was a lot of fun, and it was probably one of the best sporting events I have been to in recent memory. Don't believe me? Let's look at the stats:

*Attendance:*

Blackhawks Game - 18,460

St. John's Game - 56\*

Bears Game - 61,500

\*Note: The 56 counted also counted the players, coaches, cheerleaders, refs, and the fans.

*Final Score:*

Blackhawks - Chicago 4 vs. Detroit 3 (OT)

St. John's - St. John's 49 vs. Concord 35

Bears - Chicago 16 vs. Minnesota 13

*Payroll:*

Blackhawks - Chicago: \$44.5 million, Detroit \$77.5 million. Combined total: \$122.3 million

St. John's - St. John's: \$0, Concord \$0. Combined total: \$0

Bears - Chicago \$71.8 million, Minnesota \$43.6 million. Combined total: \$115.4 million

*Tickets:*

Blackhawks - \$15

St. John's - Admission is free

Bears - \$80

*Parking:*

Blackhawks - \$16

St. John's - Free

Bears - \$35

*Concessions:*

Blackhawks - Hotdog and a beer, \$8.50. Game Program, \$5.00

St. John's - Sports drink from school vending machine, \$1.00. Game Program, N/A

Bears - Hot Chocolate and a Pretzel, \$6.75. Game Program, \$5.00

*Point Spread:*

Blackhawks - Detroit -1.5

St. John's - N/A...although word at recess was that they would win big

Bears - Minnesota -3

So after looking at the stats, is it starting to become clear why the 8th grade basketball game was the most enjoyable? Because it was sports the way sports was meant to be played--for the love of the game. No cameras, reporters, or TV coverage. No point spreads, over/unders, or parlays. No DUI's, drugs, or murder conspiracies. No salaries, signing bonuses or endorsements. It was simply sports for the love of the sport.

Plus not to mention that it was refreshing to be at a basketball game where the officials call violations such as traveling, double dribble, 3-seconds in the lane and carrying the ball. After years of watching NBA games, I had actually forgotten that these calls existed. But mainly it was so enjoyable because the kids weren't playing for money.

Sure I bet every kid on the court has dreamed about playing in the NBA. I know I did when I was the team's starting shooting guard, but I wasn't worried about how my game would effect my shoe deal, or how my last-second miss would be covered in the paper. I played because I loved the game, and I wish that more professional athletes would play that way today.

Whether they want it or not, many athletes are heroes and idols of youth (and some adults) across the nation. We look up to them, we want to be like them, we wish that for one moment we could actually be them. And what do these athletes, who are living out the dreams of most every boy do? They get arrested, they do drugs, they stay out late and party, and they put sports second and fame and publicity first.

Of course this isn't to say that every athlete is this way, but even one unprofessional athlete is too many.

So guys, if you are reading this, it is my wish that the next time before you take the field, court or ice, you take a few seconds to think about how you are living out the dreams of millions, and how when you make a cellular call from the end zone or when you do some other stupid or dumb thing, that there are at least five kids who are going to want to do the same thing you did.

You have the best jobs in the world. Don't continue to ruin them for us.