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## Tigard High class engages students in academics, career skills through sports marketing

By **Melissa Navas**, *The Oregonian*  
January 14, 2010, 6:24PM



View full size RANDY L. RASMUSSEN/The Oregonian

Sue Suttich (center) plans last-minute details with her advanced sports marketing students for Tigard High School's "Cram the Cage" basketball game Friday. Students were responsible for promoting the game, securing local business sponsorships, designing apparel and running halftime activities. The class is hoping to pack the gymnasium with about 900 people, much more than typically attend basketball games, Suttich said.

TIGARD -- Students in Sue Suttich's sports marketing class don't just sit in circles and discuss their favorite athletes or highlights from the last Trail Blazers game.

But if those interests are what lure them in, Suttich is OK with that. Eventually, she knows they will switch from sports talk to discussing strategies for getting advertising, designing merchandise and drawing fans to games.

The business teacher's advanced course has become so popular among **Tigard High School's** 2,000 students that more than 80 kids applied for 32 slots this year. Students not only research sports organizations' operations and meet with local professionals, but they also apply what they've learned toward promoting what they tout as the school's largest basketball event of the year.

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School spirit activities and promotions began Monday and lead up to Friday's "Cram the Cage," in which boys and girls basketball teams take on visiting **Forest Grove High School**.

The games draw a larger crowd, called the Tigard Army, than usual. One fan will win a trip for two to the Bahamas, a prize Suttich's students secured by selling sponsorships.

Sports marketing has grown in popularity at both the high school and college level in recent years.

**DECA**, an international association of students studying marketing, reported more than 250 high school sports marketing programs in the United States in a survey three years ago. Meanwhile, attendance at the association's annual sports and entertainment marketing conference has grown from 250 students to 850 in the last five years.

Paul Swangard, managing director of the **University of Oregon's Warsaw Sports Marketing Center**, said the growth in such programs is a sign that schools are trying to engage students in academics through sports.

"What has always been true is that the sports label on these courses gets kids interested," Swangard said. "It's not meant necessarily to be a bait-and-switch, but if I can use the context of sports to introduce the concepts of finance, accounting and marketing, it might help the kids care more about the topics we're discussing."



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RANDY L. RASMUSSEN/The Oregonian

Senior Brittany Bui, 17, works on a promotional poster for Friday's Cram the Cage game, as junior Drew Morris (left), 16, and senior TJ Pruneda, 17, watch.

Suttich, who with her husband owns **The Courts** sports complex in Beaverton, tries to hook students with a variety of activities, including tours of Nike's campus near Beaverton, classroom speakers and discussions of sports-related stories. She said career-related courses such as hers help tie academics to the real world.

"You're learning math, science and history, but the reason we're teaching that is because it relates to what you're going to be doing," Suttich said. "They can't always see the connection."

Other Portland-area high schools with similar programs include Beaverton's **Westview** and Portland's **Grant**.

Tigard students say their class has taught them there is more to sports than just a court, a ball or a victory.

Juniors and seniors had to sell themselves and the school as they solicited donations from local businesses. Some learned it is not that scary to go to the principal's

office to coordinate an event with an adult.

Eric Najdek, a junior who also plays on the varsity basketball team, said he took his class assignments seriously. He even refined his schmoozing skills.

"I felt like I had a job, not like I was at school," Najdek, 16, said. "I felt like I was in **The Apprentice**."

Stephanie Crone, a 17-year-old senior, said, "I was a cheerleader for a while,

## Cram the Cage

**What:** **Tigard High School** vs. **Forest Grove High School** in girls and boys varsity basketball games.

**When:** Girls' game begins at 5:45 p.m. Friday, followed by the boys' game at 7:30 p.m.

**Where:** Tigard High gym, 9000 S.W. Durham Road

**Tickets:** Available at the door. Students \$3; adults \$5.

**Information:** 503-431-5400

so I liked the community aspect of trying to get everyone united in one big group."

And if they do come, mission accomplished.

-- **Melissa Navas**

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Posted by **happyjourney**  
January 14, 2010, 9:27PM

Isn't Tigard the district that cut half of the Physical Education experience for elementary students? Ironic.

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