



Executive Director's Update

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From Roger L. Blake, Executive Director
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The Arms Race of High School Sports

High School sports relies on administrators' good faith to ensure coaches, parents, students and boosters follow rules and bylaws. Not just the letter of the rule, but the *spirit of the rule*. It is the *spirit of the rule* that separates and differentiates education-based athletics from club and travel ball organizations. To many observers of high school sports in California, that significant difference is closing.

In California, education-based athletics have been assembled this past century by school administrators who identified the endless value for their students in teaching life-long, positive character traits and skills through sport and activities participation. Through this engagement, schools played an active role in teaching positive character skills such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness and loyalty. These are traits that every parent and guardian desires from their child's coaches and schools to teach and reinforce each day they send their kids off to school.

I fear a handful of school's administrators have lost sight of that trusted duty, enforcing the *spirit of the rule* and that high school sports must be more than the "final score". I fear they have been blinded by the 3 B's; Banners, Business & Boosters. What lessons are being taught to our students and their school community when administrators are blinded by the 3 B's?

Unfortunately, this extremely small minority of schools seem to be in the headlines a disproportionate amount of the time as they appear to turn a blind eye to the true meaning of education-based athletics and forgo those lessons to capture another "W" believing that is what their school community desires. I call this phenomenon *The Arms Race of High School Sports* where unfortunately talented student-athletes are used by adults to accomplish their fleeting goal of a "W" and sports news headlines. Many of our school leaders were challenged at our recent InSideOut Initiative trainings to ensure that the adults on their campuses transform the lives of their students, not simply treat them as transactions in this arms race.

On February 6, we witnessed the increasing exploitation of the national letter of intent signing day by high schools. While it's a joyous day and families should rightfully celebrate, why are schools bragging about who had the most signees? Why are our schools holding lavish signing ceremonies during class time, inviting the press, televising it on the Internet and boasting through all means of social media?

What's the educational purpose of these ceremonies? Is it to celebrate a great achievement or is it to influence future students and parents on what school they should attend or perhaps transfer?

It used to be that colleges proudly announced whom they have offered and signed to an athletic scholarship. This was to help promote their athletic teams and encourage their financial boosters to continue to raise funds to support their school. Now we see some misguided high schools using that same business model. The optics appear to be the same, self-serving promotion and influence.

Some will claim it's to celebrate great achievement by their students. I hope those same schools that make that claim will take time out of their school day, invite the media, televise on the Internet, and use social media, in the spring when they have their senior awards day that celebrates a much larger population of students on their campuses that have received academic, community and service-oriented scholarships for college.

The overwhelming majority of school administrators place great importance in their hollowed duty to help all of their students to grow into adults who will become positive contributors to society. They take pride in the lessons learned on and off the field and courts and the role that school sports and activities play in the development of young people. We can't lose sight that those few who may have sold out and jumped into the arms race losing perspective of the true purpose of education-based athletics, developed over 100 years ago, for the 3 B's are NOT THE MAJORITY of our school leaders.

If high school sports are going to continue to thrive and help produce successful and positive adults, school administrators must

continue to take a stand when their schools are being encouraged by their boosters or coaches that are involved in the arms race. Recognize that when your school has a steady flow of new transfer students to participate in sports, your school has become part of the arms race for a championship. Think about these families when they show up at your school to register. What is the impact on those students and families that have been part of your school community since they were freshman, whose loyalty and commitment will now be pushed aside by the extremely talented arms race transfer?

I do recognize that as school and district administrators many of you have outside pressures to win that come from your adult community, including some school board members, who lack the understanding of the true purpose of education-based athletics. Too many in society equate successful athletic programs with winning and championship banners and the result has been the arms race of talented adolescent kids. Al Davis, the late owner of the Oakland Raiders, is often quoted as saying "Just Win Baby." That is the business model; that is the AAU model; that is the club sports model; where the values of education-based athletics that have been taught for 100 years doesn't appear to matter much. It is a business, it is not education.

School leaders must remember that 98% of our daughters and sons are NOT going to receive athletic scholarships and their scholastic athletic careers will end upon graduation from high school. School leaders must remember that you are not alone, that the majority of school administrators across our great state stand with you and have not succumbed to the arms race.

You must continue to say "not at our school, we stand for and teach more than just winning a game." Don't buy into the "Just Win Baby" philosophy. Don't buy into your coaches who say, "I just coach the kids who show up, transfers or not." Don't buy into coaches who say "this is what we have to do to compete." Question why transfer students keep showing up at your school. Question what are we teaching the 98% of students on our campus when the transfers keep coming. Question what happens to **our students** who have been part of our school community when the arms race transfers show up on our campus. Question the educational purpose of the National Letter of Intent signing ceremonies and the subsequent media blasts. Ask yourself, how my school's sports and activities program actions help fulfill our school's educational mission and vision?

In sports, you hear people say "keep your eye on the ball." In high school education-based athletics and activities we must keep our eyes on the "mission and purpose." As school administrators, when you question anything to do with your sports or activities programs (**and PLEASE start asking questions**), look back at your mission and purpose to guide you. I can guarantee you there is not a school in California that has winning championships and placing banners up on the wall as part of their school's educational mission be it a public, private or charter school.