

A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER



PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS – PERCEPTION OR REALITY?

During the approximately 35 years of my involvement in high school athletics in many different capacities, the discussion regarding the differences between public and private schools has been ongoing. In searching our archives, we have minutes from C.I.F. Southern Section meetings from the 1920's that have references to issues involving public and private schools, so this is nothing new. As the Commissioner of Athletics for the C.I.F. Southern Section, I am often asked about whether there is a level playing field for our member schools, both public and private, the perception that there is not and what can be done about it. Over the years, this discussion has been oversimplified in a manner that leads people to believe that all private schools operate in a certain way and all public schools operate in another. I believe that this is a far more complex situation as it relates to the member schools in our section. In the CIF-SS, approximately 40% of our schools are private, the largest percentage of private schools in an athletic entity in the United States. Most of the private schools (90%) in the CIF-SS are very small with limited facilities. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to address those perceptions as they relate to five important areas: competing for section championships, recruiting of student-athletes, student-athlete transfers, athletic facilities and payment of coaches.

- 1) **Competing for Section Championships** – In the C.I.F. Southern Section, with very few exceptions, we conduct our section championships utilizing competitive equity as our primary priority. We have consistently rejected a school enrollment-based model as a format for our playoffs. That is significant because the far majority of our private schools, by nature, are not as large as our public schools. Therefore, when enrollment-based championships were conducted in the past, private schools had a distinct advantage because they would compete in smaller school divisions. In our current model, private and public compete at a level based on their performance, regardless of school size. The playing field cannot get any more level than that.

- 2) **Recruiting of Student-Athletes** – Are the current C.I.F. Southern Section rules regarding Undue Influence the same for public and private schools? The answer to that question is yes. The situation here is not the rules being different for each group, it is the willingness or unwillingness of our member schools, both public and private, to follow our current rules that lead people to believe the playing field is not level. If everyone involved with private schools and public schools followed our rules, there would not be any issues centered on recruiting of student-athletes because our rules do not allow it.

- 3) **Student-Athlete Transfers** – Again, are the rules relating to the transfer of student-athletes from one school to another the same for all of our member schools? The answer to that question is yes. In terms of the thousands of transfers that take place in our section each year, this movement of student-athletes is happening in all directions: public to private, public to public, private to public and private to private. This situation is much larger than just a public-private one. Consider these two issues as they relate to student-athletes transferring schools. First, public school districts throughout our section are allowing students to attend schools and move to other schools within and outside their districts at levels never seen before. The number of public school districts allowing for open enrollment within their districts and allowing intra-district transfers among the schools in their districts has increased tremendously. How is that affecting our transfer numbers? Second, ask this question. How many private schools have lost students because of financial hardship? Financial hardships rarely, if ever, cause a student to transfer from a public school to a private school, but financial hardship certainly results in many more students leaving private schools for public schools. An argument could be made that private schools have more student-athletes transfer out than they have transfer in due to financial reasons.

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- 4) Athletic Facilities – There are definitely examples of excellent athletic facilities at private schools, but there are also plenty of examples of athletic facilities at public schools that are outstanding. While private schools raise money to build or renovate the facilities on their campuses, public schools have an opportunity to pass school bond measures or seek funds from within their communities to accomplish that same task. Each entity has their own funding mechanisms and it is the decision of the communities in public school districts or private school environments who will determine the status of their athletic facilities. Again, it is far too simple to say that the athletic facilities at private schools are superior to public schools because that is not the case section-wide.
- 5) Payment of Coaches – There has been plenty of attention paid to the situation related to private schools paying coaches more money than public schools can. The interesting aspect of that discussion that does not seem to get much attention is public schools can also pay coaches more money, if they wished to do so. In this current financial climate, with public schools cutting coaching positions/stipends, we know that is currently not a reality, but the fact remains that each entity has control over the issue of payment for coaches, not just private schools, and each entity has to make sound fiscal decisions in deciding how much money to pay their coaches. Finally, it is very difficult to compare public school pay scales and private school pay scales when considering other factors like health benefits and retirement benefits.

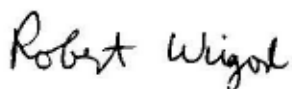
The C.I.F. Southern Section, throughout our 100 years in existence, has always represented the very best in high school athletics. We have a long tradition of competitive excellence that our section should be very proud of. That excellence has been represented over the years by both public schools and private schools. The CIF-SS has attempted to take a very proactive approach to this continuing question of public schools and private schools competing together to include:

- Formation of a Public/Private School Committee, which includes both public and private coaches and administrators.
- Addressed specific concerns immediately and remediated violations.
- Developed specific rules to cover Financial Aid.
- Educated both private and public educators on how each entity operates.

While there has been and will always be discussions regarding the differences between public schools and private schools, we should search for ways to address the realities we are faced with and not focus on certain perceptions, that upon further examination, may not be entirely accurate. Learning more about how public and private schools operate, along with an unwavering commitment to following CIF State Bylaws and CIF Southern Section Bylaws at all times can go a long way in helping everyone understand how to work together in a more positive way. That is what we have always done and what I expect us to continue to do.

In closing, from our inception in 1913, we have tried to focus our efforts on providing worthwhile experiences for all of our student-athletes, regardless of the type of school they attend. It is my hope that you will continue to support us in that effort as we begin our next 100 years.

All the best,



Rob Wigod
Commissioner of Athletics

