

A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER

ONE GOAL...MAKE THE PLAYOFFS



Many years ago, I started my first high school teaching and coaching job at Lakewood High School in the Long Beach Unified School District. I had the privilege of coaching baseball with Spud O'Neil, one of the greatest coaches this section has ever had, as he currently has over 800 wins and is still going strong. Prior to our first season together, we sat down to discuss our goals for that year's team. I said, "Our number one goal is to win the league championship, right?" He replied, "Our number one goal is to make the playoffs. Once we clinch a playoff spot, and the opportunity is there, we will go as hard as we can to win the league championship. First, we need to get into the playoffs and then we have a chance to win it all." I realized he was absolutely right, and for the rest of my coaching days, I always made sure to follow that philosophy and emphasize that concept to the teams I worked with.

One thing has been abundantly clear to me since I came to work for the CIF Southern Section is that so many people, across our broad spectrum of sports, have a burning desire to make the playoffs as well. We are very fortunate that they feel this way and gratified to know that the chance to compete for a section championship is so important to them. We hope that feeling will never go away.

This past week, with the release of our Winter Sports playoff brackets, further illustrates that point. Once our brackets are published, we hear from all kinds of people: coaches, athletic directors, parents, media members, etc., with questions related to those brackets. You might be surprised to know that the majority of the questions are not about seeding or match-ups, they are related to At-Large selections: the specific criteria used to choose At-Large teams, the requirement that teams must have an overall record of .500 or better in all games played, who got into the playoffs, who did not get into the playoffs, etc. The passion expressed by those who were not selected as At-Large entries results in some of the most difficult conversations we have, and we understand that, because it is evidence of how much it means to their programs to have the opportunity to participate in the playoffs. In response, we try to reinforce the idea that qualifying for the playoffs is primarily done through league placing and the focus must be there first, not on the At-Large situation and what may, or may not happen, in those scenarios. For example, I hear comments made that coaches purposely schedule pre-season games against inferior competition, in an effort to gather wins prior to league play, to make sure that their team can achieve an overall record of .500 or better for the entire season, making them eligible for At-Large consideration. I often wonder how that approach prepares a team for post-season competition. Who do they think they are going to play if they are in the playoffs? Teams they easily beat in the pre-season?

As our section embarks on the Releaguering process in the next few months, I hope that our member schools will keep in mind that the single most important factor in qualifying for the playoffs is the league you compete in, and the place you earn in that league, not the At-Large criteria and/or process in a particular sport. Think about it...One Goal... Make the Playoffs.

Thank you very much for your help and support and good luck always.

All the best,

Rob Wignel

