

## A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER

### EDUCATION BASED ATHLETICS – A FINAL THOUGHT FOR THIS SCHOOL YEAR



My first Message from the Commissioner of 2016-2017 strongly emphasized our need to stay committed to supporting education-based athletics because of all of the benefits our student-athletes gain by participating in high school athletic programs, especially in difficult times like these. My last Message from the Commissioner this school year, only reinforces that concept even more.

On Friday, June 2, Arrowhead Christian High School played Faith Baptist High School in the Division 7 Baseball Championship Final at UC Riverside. What I witnessed that night, will never be forgotten and further illustrates the importance of the work we do and who we do it for. Kip Gross, the Head Coach for Arrowhead Christian High School, was not at that game. He had attended our Championship Finals meeting in our office on the Wednesday morning before Friday's game and went back to school for practice in the afternoon. At home, later that evening, his wife, Jamie Gross, was not feeling well so he took her to the hospital to be examined. The next day, Jamie Gross unexpectedly had a heart attack and passed away. That is why Kip Gross was not at the game. However, Tucker Gross, his son, was the starting 2nd Baseman for Arrowhead Christian and he was at the game. Before the game started, both teams got together in a circle behind home plate and observed a moment of silence in memory of Jamie Gross. They did that on their own, no one told them to do it or suggested that they do it. Once the game started, every time Tucker Gross came to the plate, the fans from both teams stood up and cheered loudly for him. It was incredibly moving to see that happen, and again, no one told them to do it or suggested they do it. Arrowhead Christian won the game, and after the awards ceremony was over, Tucker Gross was given the championship plaque by his teammates and coaches to take home to his Dad. I had a moment to speak with him after the awards ceremony was over and I told him that he had honored both of his parents that night by playing in the game and we were all very proud of him for doing so.

My thoughts were...After the worst day of his young life, this is exactly where Tucker Gross needed to be: with his teammates, his coaches and his community. Being involved in high school athletics, at a time like this, certainly helped him cope with what had happened and provided so much support for him and his family. Once again, this certainly reinforces the value of what we do and who we do it for. Thank you to Arrowhead Christian and to Faith Baptist for your care, for your compassion and for your humanity. You inspire us all.

As we reflect on the school year that has just finished, I hope you never forget what a difference you are making in the lives of the young people we are so fortunate to serve. I hope you never forget what progress we have made in developing and fostering valuable and meaningful relationships with you, our member schools. You are a special group, one that I am very proud of, and am grateful to have the opportunity to lead. I look forward to continuing to do this important work with you in the time ahead as we make that difference that means so much to so many.

Thank you very much for your help and support, it is truly appreciated.

*Rob Wignel*

