

A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER

ONE OF OURS



Winter Break is a time to relax, unwind and help recharge the battery for the new year to come. For me, this year was no exception and I hope it was the same for you. One of the things I have enjoyed over the last several years during Winter Break is attending the Holiday Bowl Football Classic in San Diego. It has always been a fun day and night: leave home in the early afternoon, drive to Old Town for great Mexican food and then head to the stadium for a 6:00 pm kick-off. It has never mattered who was playing, this year it was Washington State from the Pac-12 and Michigan State from the Big 10, because it has always been enjoyable to watch two good football teams go at each other and this year was no exception.

However, for me, this year's match-up had a compelling story. Washington State's starting quarterback that night was redshirt Sophomore Tyler Hilinski, a name I was familiar with, as he was an Upland High School graduate and had led the Highlanders to great success during his career there. I was excited to see him get an opportunity to play, and being from a Southern Section school, I am proud to say that he is one of ours. Tyler played well and certainly showed he was ready to become the starter for the Cougars for the 2018 season. It was a great night.

Three days later, I attended a Los Angeles Rams game at the Coliseum where the Rams were honoring their High School Football Coaches of the Week from the 2017 season. One of those honorees was Upland High School Head Football Coach Tim Salter. I had the chance to visit with Tim that day and told him how much I enjoyed watching Tyler play for Washington State the other night. Tim replied that he was very proud of Tyler, how much he appreciated him when he was at Upland and how excited he was for his future as the starting quarterback at Washington State next season. To top it off, at the end of the 3rd quarter, Tim Salter was selected as the High School Coach of the Year and was given two Super Bowl tickets! It was a great day.

How quickly things have changed. On Tuesday, January 16, 2018, Tyler Hilinski was found in his apartment in Pullman, Washington, after apparently taking his own life. Tyler was 21 years old. As I said, he is one of ours. It was a horrible day.

Since I heard the news, I have not been able to stop thinking about what happened. From the outside, we see a young man in the prime of his life, who had put in the hard work, been patient, paid his dues and was ready to embark on a great future. None of us knew of the dark place and the incredible pain that he was in. It breaks my heart to think that he was suffering so much and wish there was a way to have helped him before it was too late.

I did not know Tyler Hilinski personally, but I felt connected to him because he is one of ours and I would always want the best for him. I do not know his parents, but as a parent, I cannot imagine what they are going through. They are ours as well. I know of Tyler's younger brother Ryan, an outstanding quarterback in his own right at Orange Lutheran High School who will be a Senior this Fall for the Lancers. He is one of ours.

At this most difficult time, please keep Tyler and his family in your minds and in your hearts as my staff and I do. They are ours.

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

All the best,

Rob Wignol

