

A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER

I NEED HELP



February is designated each year as National Women in Sports Month. Throughout this period of time, there are several events that take place within our section to highlight the achievements of female athletes, but more importantly, to recognize strong, independent women who are leaders, role models and examples for our student-athletes to emulate today. Last week, I attended one such event, the Foothill Citrus Athletic Directors Association Women in Sports Celebration, entitled Girls Got Game. This one-day conference brought 600 female student-athletes from the schools in the Foothill/Citrus Area together to hear from various speakers who shared their experiences in an effort to not only celebrate the power of women today, but to motivate and inspire young ladies for tomorrow, the next day, the next day after that, and so on.

One of the presenters that morning was Dr. Nancy Kelly, the Superintendent in the Upland Unified School District. Dr. Kelly told the story of her own personal journey. She began as an age-group swimmer, but by the time she went to high school, she had given up swimming and became a high school cheerleader. She continued to describe what she went through during her college years, her time in graduate school, her initial work in education as a school counselor, before becoming an Assistant Principal, a Principal, an Assistant Superintendent and then into her present position as Superintendent in the Upland Unified School District.

However, there was a deeper message behind the story of Dr. Kelly's many, many accomplishments over the years, a message that was very real and compelling. In detailing the various stages of her life, Dr. Kelly exposed some of her vulnerabilities. She was very open and honest about her and her family's struggles with her younger sister who had anorexia. She relayed the devastation she felt with the death of her best friend because of a drunk driver when she was in college and the depression she felt with the loss of such a close friend. She reached a point where she questioned whether she could go on and persevere through such tragedy. At that time, she realized a very important thing and she was not afraid to acknowledge it. She knew she needed help and she knew she needed to ask for it, which is exactly what she did, and from that point on, she was able to overcome that terrible time in her life and reach a position where she is at the pinnacle of educational leadership in our section. In closing, Dr. Kelly stated that athletes are taught to be disciplined, tough minded and to say, "I've got this" when faced with difficult situations, but there is nothing wrong in admitting when you need help. Her final words to the girls that morning were, "Don't be afraid to approach someone and say, 'I need help'."

When Dr. Kelly finished, it was clear her words resonated with the audience. Several girls came up to her to talk and/or ask questions as it was evident that they felt close to her, but there was one young lady who was different. One young lady approached her and said, "I need help." Immediately, Dr. Kelly comforted her and reached out to her school's guidance counselor prior to her return to campus. This was real and this was important. Perhaps a life was saved, a path was turned around and a young person in despair could see a way out. Each and every day, let us all resolve to empower our students, as Dr. Kelly did, to seek help from us anytime and anywhere.

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

All the best,

Rob Wignel

