

## A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER

### LOYALTY



I have always extolled the virtues of education-based athletics. I have consistently expressed the importance of using our platform of the high school athletic experience to teach lifelong lessons to young people, such as hard work, teamwork, perseverance, dealing with adversity, setting individual goals aside for the betterment of team goals, how to get along with others from different races, religions, backgrounds, socio-economic status and so on. The list is endless. I truly believe in the value of what we do and who we do it for, as an example of all that is good in American society. However, I feel that there is one virtue we may not be teaching and reinforcing enough in the present day and that is the concept of loyalty.

Loyalty, in general use, is a devotion and faithfulness to a group or a person. In our present environment, I see where loyalty is not being taught or reinforced to student-athletes, and not being followed by parents and coaches. With the number of transfers that take place each year, it is evident that the lesson students learn from their parents is at the first sign of something they do not like, they must leave that school and go to another one. Instead of loyalty to your school, classmates, teammates, coaches and community, the answer is to uproot the student-athlete from all of those influences and head for School B. In addition, some students have transferred three and four times during their high school years, resulting in not only in a School B, but a School C and a School D! How does that help young people for their future? If their first response to a difficult situation is to run from it, what will that mean when student-athletes become husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, employees or employers? We are doing a great disservice to young people when we offer them the easy way out instead of teaching them how to work through a tough time and overcome the challenges that they face. They will be better off for it if we do so.

What about our coaches? Think back to the first parent meeting that is held at a school. This is what typically happens. The Head Coach gets up in front of the group of students and parents and tells them how much their student-athlete will benefit from being a part of their program. The students and parents will be told they need to fund raise, give up family vacations, weekends, time with friends, etc., so they can participate in practices, games and off-season training, but it will all be worth it whether the student-athlete gets playing time or not. The students and parents sign on for that commitment and fulfill their responsibilities from that first meeting on. However, look at the paragraph above. Here comes the transfer student to School B, who has done none of the things the current student-athletes and parents have done at that school, and what happens next? The transfer student, who has made no commitment to the program, is immediately given opportunities in front of those who are already there. The coach has demanded loyalty from the students and parents in his/her program from that very first parent meeting and when they have the opportunity to return that loyalty by rewarding those who have sacrificed for their program, they turn their backs on them in favor of what is new, and in their mind, better. I don't know how coaches can say one thing when it comes to loyalty and then not return it when the time comes.

We make a difference in the lives of the young people we are so fortunate to serve through their participation in high school athletic programs. In doing so, we must never lose sight of the responsibility we have to teach them everything we can to help them. Let us not forget to include loyalty in that effort.

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

*Rob Weigal*

