

**Thank you for the invitation. It's rare that coaches have a chance to express their opinions at this level; therefore, my opportunity to do so is very much appreciated.**

**Key points in analyzing “the level playing field” and fairness of competition.**

**Competitive fairness in Pennsylvania high school sports, primarily the high-profile sports of football and basketball has always been an issue. Pointedly so, since parochial schools joined the PIAA in 1972. At that time, PA Act 149 amended the state's school code with the following: “Private schools shall be permitted, if otherwise qualified, to be members of the PIAA. That law has been interpreted, by the PIAA, it's attorneys and advisors in the legislature, to prohibit creation of separate playoffs for boundary (public) and non-boundary (private or charter) schools.” Note: nowhere in the law does it state the PIAA is not allowed to create public versus public and private vs private state playoff brackets.**

**Key Points:**

- 1. Private schools can recruit athletes to fit or replace their needs. Anyone who does not believe that this is happening, is blind to the facts! This begins at a low level of competition beginning in youth sports. The athletes are evaluated by booster groups and recruited to play in the system.**

- 2. There are tuition waivers granted to players who want to attend private school. The NIL program is a tremendous benefit to private schools. Name, image, likeness. Sponsors will pay tuition waivers for the special athletes.**
- 3. There are virtually no boundaries for private schools to recruit from. Public schools can only compete with the kids who live in the zip codes of their school districts. Some players may even be out of state playing at a private school in Pennsylvania.**
- 4. When public schools allow a Co-op agreement with a neighboring school district they must accept the entire male enrollment of that school. When a private school takes one student from four different schools, they do not add any additional students to their enrollment.**
- 5. The very foundation of a private school is recruiting. The problem here is that 93% of the total schools that play football in Pennsylvania cannot, by PIAA standards, recruit.**
- 6. There is no accountability for the money available for tuition waivers in these private schools.**

- 7. There are not even boundaries within a Catholic diocese. Example: The Diocese of Harrisburg; players can live near 1 Catholic High School but can go to any Catholic High School in the diocese.**
- 8. The private schools operate their athletic programs like colleges. This includes recruiting, scholarships, and no boundaries.**
- 9. Our two bordering states, New Jersey and Maryland, separate public and private teams for playoffs. They compete during the season, but for district and state playoffs, they separate.**
- 10. I believe that some of the differences mentioned have created a college or even a professional like atmosphere. That includes recruiting frenzies at high school All-Star camps and combines, free agency tryouts, stealing players, and social media hype that has helped us to lose focus on the real values of high school athletics. I don't know if we can ever change this atmosphere, but it certainly would be refreshing to see the PIAA do something positive for the high schools in Pennsylvania that still run athletic programs the morally correct way; that includes both boundary and non-boundary schools.**

**11. My proposal would be for you to think about separating the non- boundary and boundary schools when playoffs begin. The NCAA seems to get it with their four divisions based on allotted scholarships, financial aid and resources. It allows a school (like East Stroudsburg University) with less scholarships, less resources, and less prestige to play Penn State during the regular season if they wished, but they do not have to play them for a national title. I don't see why a similar philosophy cannot be discussed by the PIAA. By using this type of system, no school will be excluded from any of the opportunities that they presently have.**

**I appreciate your time and efforts,**

**Jim Cantafio**

**Retired teacher and coach**

