Sanctioning Athletic Competition

Amateur sports in general and most recently high school sports in Alabama have taken an uneasy turn that threatens the fairness and dignity of athletic competition.

The *Alabama Christian Athletic Association (ACAA)* has been around for forty or more years. It has been our position from the beginning that we would sanction our athletic competitions in all sports. *Sanctioned athletics refers to officially approved sporting events, leagues, or competitions that adhere to standardized rules, safety protocols, and ethical guidelines of a recognized governing body. The purpose is to ensure fair play, safeguard student-athlete eligibility (USA Track & Field)…and validate legitimate winners of approved contests (copied from the internet).*

It is our position that the adherence to eligibility requirements for athletes be *independently verified by assigned league persons with knowledge of all eligibility requirements.*

Basic components of athletic eligibility are as follows:

- School is a member in good standing
- All athletes are enrolled in the participating member school and that school is the "school of record." ALL students must be enrolled in the participating league member school and cannot be a student of another "school entity" and be eligible.
- Student status must be independently verified by the league
  > Age (birth certificate required)
  > Grades (based on up-to-date transcripts)
  >Residence (Bonafide move rule is always applicable)

>Appropriate conduct approved by the school administrator
> Health (physical required)
>Transfer rule (strictly enforced)

Schools or “sports conferences” that do not follow these basic rules are not and cannot be “sanctioned.”

Schools that form teams with non-students identifying with almost any definition of being a school or educational entity cannot be “sanctioned.”

It has long been our position that we avoid playing these “recruited/pick-up” teams for several reasons. There are several items of interest to consider, including…

1. Liability issues. Playing teams that cannot guarantee liability coverage for their sports teams puts your school in a compromising position.
2. “Every man does what is right in his own eyes” mentality. The lack of committing to an independent basic enforcement authority is problematic from the “get-go.”
3. The method of appropriating athletes is flawed. I did not say “recruiting.” Do I have to? Athletes may be “located and wooed” without regard to residence or the status of their “school” or educational program. The ability of the athletes to pay school expenses on the same basis as other legitimately enrolled on campus students is compromised.
4. Athletic teams may form from any pool of high school-aged persons regardless of school affiliation or legal standing.

5. Academic inconsistency and differences are problems. Whether or not grades or checked doesn't really seem to matter. Subject matter and instructional legitimacy are different from one educational entity to the other for the students that may comprise a team. Traditional on-campus students are all expected to meet the same academic standards to earn grades and graduate, and therefore eligible to compete on *their athletic teams*.

Since the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) has divided private and public schools in two different groups for championships per sport it behooves us to stay focused and do "it" right. And with the news that the Alabama Independent School Association will no longer sponsor sports after this next year, we need to be cautious, yet thankful for ACAA.

ACEA/ACAA has always been careful to respect the autonomy of all member schools. And we will continue to champion that position. BUT we need to be careful not to reward and attempt to compete with entities (notice I did not say *schools*) that are not legitimate high school athletic teams.

A few years back the AHSAA adopted what is known as the "Tim Tebow" rule. This rule made provision for home schooled students to play on public high school athletic teams if certain reasonable minimum requirements are met. The basic tenants of the rule do several necessary things.

1. Require students to be on campus for up to two periods a day
2. Take the same semester test that on campus students take.

3. And take the required end of the year test that all other public-school students take.
4. Pay the required athletic fees charged to all other athletes.

These provisions fixed the “apples to oranges dilemma” by *standardizing academic expectations*. The same was done for charter schools, which at the time were on the rise.

My position? Respect the honesty and legitimacy of sanctioned interscholastic athletic competition.

Respectfully Submitted,
J. Robin Mears
Executive Director of the Alabama Christian Education