

# Dear coach: Don't judge your success by what private schools do

**DURING THE PAST** few weeks the letters to the editor in the sports section have faintly resembled an elevated version of two 5-year-olds trying to argue.

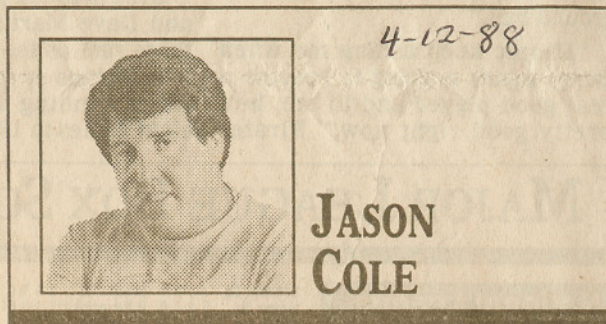
On the one side, you have Los Altos girls soccer coach **Nelson Lodge** accusing the private/Catholic schools of recruiting. On the other, you have parents — presumably of students at private schools — saying that the schools don't recruit.

Along the way, both sides like to take snide little swipes at each other's arguments. It's pretty humorous, but also pretty irrelevant.

Irrelevant if everyone would just accept the fact that yes, private schools do recruit. How else would you get parents to shell out a few thousand dollars every year for what is supposed to be a basic right?

But if Lodge (and other public school coaches) believes that recruiting manifests itself in private school coaches visiting prospective students or combing the public schools for big, strong kids, he's being silly.

**THOSE KIND OF SHENANIGANS** are played by people who have a lot more at stake, like the **Barry Switzers** of the world. Teachers like St. Francis basketball coach **Bill Delaney** (who is also the chairman of the English Department) have to concentrate on



their jobs when they're not coaching, or else they wouldn't have jobs.

Recruiting manifests itself in a myriad of ways. One big way is that students and parents are attracted to schools like St. Francis, Serra, Pinewood, Menlo or Bellarmine because of success. Another way is that parents want their kids in private schools for what they perceive as a superior education.

Finally, of course, students go to Catholic schools because they're Catholic. Of the 13 players on the St. Francis varsity basketball team, 10 went to Catholic or private junior high schools. Of the 50 players on the St. Francis varsity football team, 36 went to Catholic

or private junior highs. It's not a case of great athletes at public schools all of a sudden jumping ship.

**YES, PRIVATE SCHOOLS** play under a different set of rules from the public schools. There are no boundaries for private schools — nor should there be. At some private schools, scholarships are offered, which is great for kids who need the help.

The problem on the Peninsula is that not only do public schools coaches have to accept the fact that they lose kids to the likes of Serra and Bellarmine, they also have to compete against them.

St. Francis and Los Altos do compete against each other. Not in the same league, but for the same titles in the same section. St. Francis' girls teams compete in the De Anza Athletic League with six other public schools.

That situation creates automatic resentment and justifiably so. Year in and year out, the West Catholic Athletic League schools produce more consistent winning teams than any other league. Until this season, either St. Francis or Bellarmine reached the Central Coast Section football championship game for 10 straight years. The examples could go on forever.

What does this mean for public schools? It means

do the best you can, but don't judge your success by what private schools do. Realize that while you have a decent chance to win a CCS title in a given year, the private schools have a better chance over the long run.

**YES, COACH LODGE** (and I know you're already on the way to the typewriter) it may not always seem fair, but it's reality. You've probably heard all the stories about the recruiting lists that private school alumni supposedly make each year. You (like I) have overheard some parent from a private school trying to talk a young kid into going to that school. Maybe you've seen a private school coach out watching a youth soccer match or doing something you deem close to recruiting.

But the salient point was made in an off-hand remark by St. Francis baseball coach **Chris Bradford**. Bradford was talking about sophomore hitting sensation **Adam Noto**. Around the Peninsula, close observers have known about Noto for four or five years. But amid all the superlatives, Bradford said:

"The first time I ever heard about Noto was when the freshman coach told me one day, 'Hey, I think we've got a hitter on the freshman team.'"