



Sticking it to Kentucky's private school student-athletes

By Jim Waters

Lawmakers shot down a proposal last week requiring students who transfer from public to private schools to sit out of sports for a year.

They made the right call.

This story is more than just about sports and kids. It illustrates well the evils associated with people trying to use government to do their competing for them.

Public-school officials swear it's just about "leveling the playing field." Not really. It's more about sticking it to private schools.

I wouldn't know that for sure except for multitudes of *unfounded* rumors that parochial schools cheat to recruit athletes.

Such rumors invariably implicate rich football traditions at Kentucky's prestigious Catholic high schools, but not so much at *public schools* that also happen to have enviable athletic – as well as academic – programs. Hmm...

Supporters of parental school choice suffer similarly when the bureaucracy trumps up some bogus research indicating school choice doesn't work while ignoring the mediocre performance of its own public-school system.

But I don't get mad about all this. Instead, I prefer to drive statist crazy by answering their nonsense with this bit of common sense: Name one product or service – including education – for which unfettered competition doesn't improve quality and lower price.

You can't do it, can you?

The Kentucky High School Athletic Association (KHSAA) has regulations dealing with illegal recruiting. Coaches lose jobs and schools get placed on probation in these rare instances.

Unsatisfied anti-choice bureaucrats, however, want to answer perceived unfairness with clarion idiocy by penalizing every student-athlete whose family moves into a district from another locale during the summer before the student's freshman year.

Like most government-induced programs, the KHSAA's plan is a one-size-fits-all policy failing to distinguish between families who happen to move into a district for employment, housing or other innocent reasons – say,

because it just might be a *better school* – from those dirty scoundrels – all six of them – who moved because some coach crossed the line.

Even Catholic-school students recognize what this is really about. They know the seven deadly sins – in this case, envy, pride, greed and sloth – when they see them.

Parents of children competing in classrooms and on athletic fields of our state’s private schools are the only people with the credibility to yell “bias” in the crowded KHSAA conference room. They sacrifice to pay both property taxes that support public schools their children don’t attend, *plus* their private-school tuition.

Sen. Tim Shaugnessy, D-Louisville, told an Associated Press reporter a couple of years ago, when this issue raised its ugly head in a previous encounter: The KHSAA’s response “to strong competition is not harder work, it’s changing the rules. If the superintendents who pushed this issue would bring the same commitment to education in the classroom, Kentucky wouldn’t be 50th in just about everything.”

What a great lesson the KHSAA offers students: When things get tough on the playing field, whine, exaggerate and find a way to lower the standards.

The problem is, that’s not the way it works in real life.

KHSAA officials and their lackeys gripe that private schools have an edge because they “recruit” students in a broader area and offer them financial aid. But they exaggerate by not also pointing out that there has *not* been a flood of illegal incidences and that this is really about their jealousy over the wins piled higher than goal posts at Lexington Catholic High.

Instead of forcing students to pay the price for the competitive nature of private schools, why not really level the playing field by letting public schools engage in the same sort of recruitment of students?

That idea is anathema to most public-school administrators obsessed with how they look on the field.

Just imagine how they’d be whining to cover up for poor student achievement if forced to compete off the field, too.

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