

Finger-pointing abounds as athletes transfer high schools

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Private schools and powerhouse programs are easy punching bags in high school sports. In Sacramento-area football, it's Folsom and Capital Christian that take a beating from parents or coaches frustrated by their prowess. In boys' basketball, it's Sheldon,

which competes for state championships and easily rules the Sacramento-area scene.

The good schools are often accused of recruiting good players to transfer to play for them. But there's another side of the story.

It even happens in softball, where games typically attract crowds of less than 50 people, usually just the parents of players.

Elk Grove coach Amanda Buck looks across town and sees a loaded Sheldon roster; seven of the Huskies' starters last spring transferred from other schools, Buck says. The effect on schools in the Elk Grove Unified School District is profound, Buck says.

"It always puts all of us in this little six-, seven-mile radius we're all in, with Franklin and Cosumnes Oaks and Pleasant

Grove, it all puts us in a tough situation because we all want to compete and we still feel we have a really tough league but it's hard to go in every time you play them and have respect for them, but man, these girls aren't supposed to go here," she said.

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college. You can't recruit. There couldn't be a ton of transfers going to the same school."

Buck cites the influence of travel club softball at Sheldon. Of Sheldon's four assistant coaches listed on staff at MaxPreps.com last season, three were either coaches or on the managing board of the Lady Magic softball club. Lady Magic players gravitate to Sheldon because the coaches are encouraging them to play there, Buck says.

Sheldon coach Mary Jo Truesdale acknowledges she has transfers in her program. At least four players last spring went through the Sac-Joquin

Section's transfer portal, were ruled ineligible to play immediately, and sat out as long as required by the section. That's allowed under section rules and Sheldon is doing nothing wrong, Truesdale said.

"I've always had kids that have transferred. They come to Sheldon for a lot of different reasons. Ultimately, they do play softball for me," she said. "It's been since the beginning of Sheldon 25 years ago, kids have played softball here but lived in other areas. But it's been that way at a lot of schools in the area. As long as they follow the transfer rules, that's the most important thing."

The complaints voiced about Sheldon are similar to what people say about private schools in other sports. Christian Brothers football coach Larry Morla has heard those chirps from fans, but they're mostly directed at other private schools in the Sacramento area. Morla says he and other Christian Brothers coaches often have to build football players from the ground up, starting in ninth grade when they hand out equipment.

"Most of our freshmen haven't put pads on," he said. "When we do our equipment handout, it takes three times as long for that, because they don't know how to put shoulder pads on."

In boys' basketball, the dynamic is much the same as any other sport. A cou-

ple of teams are very good every year, and it's not just because the coaches are amazing at their jobs.

"It sucks because it's always the same schools," Elk Grove coach Dustin Monday said. "If kids are transferring out, it's always the same handful of schools. That gives the perception those guys must be recruiting. I don't think there's any coaches out there doing that. One, because that's gonna come back to bite you at some point. But at the same time, I think the landscape is now, if there are kids that are talented and aren't happy, and your program is good, they're just gonna show up to you anyway."

The bottom line, high school coaches say, is transferring to play for a better program doesn't

make a ton of sense. The vast majority of college scholarships are handed out for work on club teams and elite camps. Buck, the Elk Grove softball coach, said it's ridiculous for kids to travel half an hour just to win a few more high school games.

"You really don't get recruited out of high school," she said. "My biggest thing is I want a kid to come to Elk Grove as a freshman and understand the pride and the honor you have of playing for your school."

Truesdale, at rival Sheldon, agrees with that. And turns the argument on its head. If high school games don't matter that much, then why is it a big deal if players switch schools? Sheldon has strong academics and a diverse student body, in addition to a

powerful softball program. There's plenty of reasons for kids to go there, she said.

"They want to play somewhere where you have fun, and to be honest, we have fun. We laugh. We try to give them an experience at Sheldon, granted we're competitive, but we try to have a good time. If we can't laugh during practices and games, then it's just not worth it," Truesdale said. "... These are kids. Just let them play where they want to play. They're not gonna get their college scholarship from us."

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