

CIF commissioners to discuss response to IMG Academy recruiting



T.J. Pledger of Chaminade is transferring to IMG Academy in Florida. (Luis Sinco / Los Angeles Times)

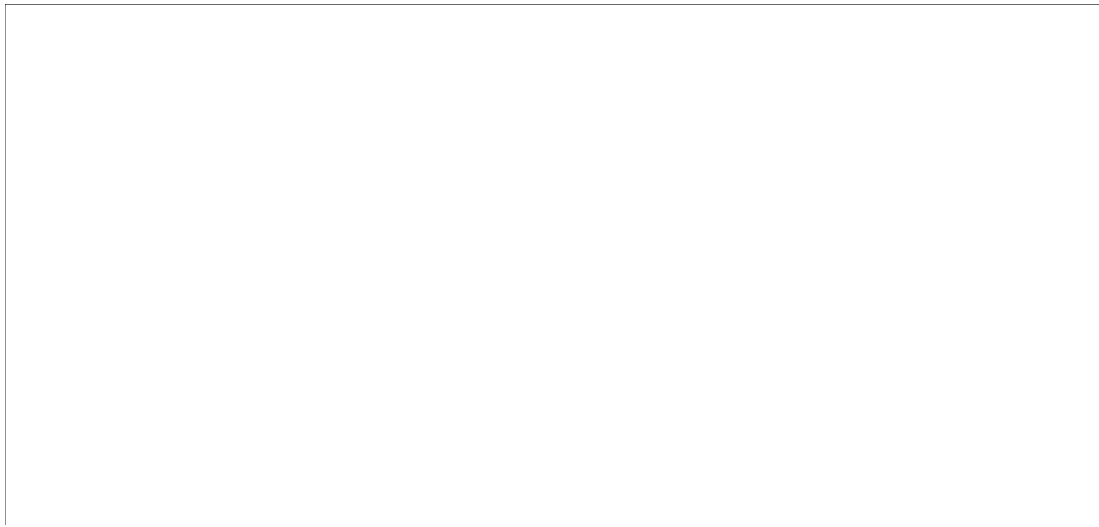
By **Eric Sondheimer**

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California Interscholastic Federation commissioners are scheduled next week to discuss a possible response to IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla., actively recruiting high school athletes to participate in its sports programs.

Here's the recruiting rule from the Florida High School Athletic Assn.: "Recruiting is considered an act of gross unsportsmanlike conduct and is expressly forbidden."

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But it is not against the rules for IMG to recruit high school athletes from outside Florida, according to Mike Colby, director of eligibility for the Florida association.

That explains how IMG has been able to take away in the last few weeks running back T.J. Pledger from Chaminade and defensive back Brendan Radley-Hiles from Calabasas.

In response, on the agenda for next week's state meeting of CIF commissioners in Sacramento is a discussion about IMG, Southern Section Commissioner Rob Wigod said Tuesday.

In a written statement, Wigod said, "We are aware of the situation, as it relates to student-athletes from member schools within our section being contacted by IMG Academy. Also, this is not just a CIF Southern Section issue, it is something we are experiencing state-wide. Therefore, this situation is on the agenda for next week's CIF Commissioner's meeting in order to discuss it. More information should be forthcoming after that meeting."

IMG is not allowed to recruit athletes in Florida and doesn't compete in Florida state championships. But Florida law allows any high school program to be part of its athletic association. And California schools are allowed to play IMG because it's part of the Florida athletic association.

That raises the question of why should teams from California be allowed to play IMG when it is openly recruiting athletes in violation of CIF recruiting rules? For example, IMG sought to bring in baseball standout Hunter Greene from Sherman Oaks Notre Dame. He turned them down.

Corona Centennial's football team played IMG last fall in a nonleague game, but that might be the last time if IMG continues to pursue athletes from the state. IMG's football roster includes players from numerous states and different countries.

Chaminade Athletic Director Todd Borowski emailed a letter to Florida officials complaining, "IMG called TJ a few weeks ago and was trying to get him and a few other players in the area to go there. I don't know your rules there, but out here that would be a HUGE violation."

As if high school coaches in Southern California didn't have enough obstacles to deal with, now their top players can be openly wooed by another prep program.

The discussion next week also will involve what to do about athletes coming and going from prep schools.

The question for the commissioners is will California schools and the CIF put up with this kind of blatant disregard for what high school sports is supposed to be about?

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