

Weekly Eagle News – Head of Schools

My Favorite Parents:

An era will conclude at the end of this school year. Russ DeKock, our upper school athletic director, will retire at the end of the year having completed 40 years at Redlands Christian Schools. Mr. DeKock has been a teacher, coach, principal and athletic director in our school system and will leave a legacy of positively impacted student lives.

I am grateful for his work as our athletic director. He stepped in at a time when we were struggling in some of the most basic functions of the office particularly related to issues of communication. He righted the ship and set a high bar on ensuring that all the little things (scheduling, communication, transportation, etc.) were done well. Later, he worked with our senior leadership, a committee of interested parents and our athletic boosters to move our programs forward. The results of this work have particularly emerged in this period since COVID, where we have seen a 21% increase in the number of varsity teams qualifying for CIF playoffs and 67% increase in teams winning league championships.

For the last couple of years, we have been preparing for this transition with the hope that we would be able to hire from within. I am pleased to announce that we have appointed Mike DeJong as our Director of Athletics. For many of you, you have seen him do a great job with leading our middle school sports or coaching, but I want to share three reasons I am excited about him moving into this position.

First, I would point to our summer athletic camps program. For years, we offered one sport (basketball) for one week. We challenged Mike to develop the summer athletic camp opportunities and he has exceeded expectations. Now there is a separate camp nearly every week of the summer representing developmental opportunities in nearly every varsity program we offer.

Second, Mike made a decision to participate in our school's internal leadership development program. As part of the program participants take on a leadership project that would help our school move forward. For Mike's project he connected with some of the leading Christian schools across the country to assess the characteristics essential to outstanding Christian school athletic programs. His report is a blueprint of much of what we hope to do over the next few years.

Finally, my favorite fact I appreciate... when Mike reported back to me on the biggest takeaways he gained from his research, he and I were on the same page that a top priority was strengthening the extent to which our athletic programs were part of our mission fulfillment as a school. We want to use sports to help grow students spiritually.

With Mike moving into this position, it also gives us a chance to re-think the rest of the structure of our athletic department. Mike will actually oversee athletics on all three campuses and we will appoint a MS Coordinator of athletics and LS Coordinator of athletics.

Have a great week.

Brian