

CHSSA HALL OF FAME 2013

Craig Austin



Craig Austin was born in Fresno, raised outside Delano and graduated from South High School where he was fortunate enough to be coached for one year by Hall of Fame coach Ann Cierley. Craig graduated from St. Mary's College with a degree in Classics from the Integral Program. After short teaching stints in Arizona and the Philippines (where he met his wife Helen), he earned his teaching credential from San Francisco State while competing on their debate team.

In 1989 Craig bumped into Ann once again at a job fair. When he said that he was open to coaching forensics, she gave him a pre-interview and sent him to the principal of the school. Craig was hired at Bakersfield High School where he took over a successful program that was previously coached by his mentor, Larry Adams. While at BHS, his teams finished in the top ten in sweepstakes awards several times and he had the pleasure of coaching three state champions, five runner-ups, a national champion in Impromptu Speaking and a runner-up in Student Congress. In 1995 Craig moved to Centennial High School to work with his good friend Bud Davis to help build a program there. In 1998 he had the pleasure of coaching a state championship Policy Debate team (his favorite event). A change in graduation requirements reduced the number of classes available for forensics, so Craig took on the position of the Academic Decathlon coach and eventually the role of the supportive parent when his daughter and son came into the program. He was asked to return as a head coach when state budget cuts and declining enrollment forced a significant reduction in the school's staff. The program rebounded nicely, and in 2010 Centennial won the AA Sweepstakes award led by a state championship in Policy Debate by none other than his son Brian and his partner Joe Davis (yes, also the son of Bud Davis). Craig will tell you that this was both his proudest and happiest moment in a long career.

Besides serving as a coach, Craig is currently the English Department Chair at Centennial High School. In addition, he has held many offices in Kern Region Forensics and has served on the Sierra District Committee and as the District Chair. During his tenure as coach, the chapters at both Bakersfield and Centennial High School were among the largest in the district. Craig frames the NFL certificates in the classroom and uses them as motivation for competition. "Who says that high school kids don't like stickers" he is fond of saying. Such a strategy gets them to compete in a multiplicity of events which further enhances their forensics experience.

Craig would tell you that the best thing that he ever did in high school was competitive forensics. "I would never have made it through college without the skills that I learned from forensics and have seen first hand how these skills have benefited both my students and children."

Craig is a four diamond coach in the "real" NFL and believes that coaching was simply the best thing that he had ever done in education. "What makes the activity great is that students really learn because of the competitive element of the activity. Every tournament is a test of not only your work and talent but also of your character and that applies to the coach as well."