

David Dansky

CHSSA HALL OF FAME 1990



When David was asked what he did for a living before retiring, he would proudly reply that he coached forensics at John F Kennedy in Richmond for twenty-five years: “and if I could become a young man again , knowing all the pitfalls of teaching in an under-funded urban school district, I would enthusiastically embrace the title of forensics coach again!”.

He describes his early years as, “peripatetic.” He was born in Brooklyn, New York, on December 6, 1941. December 7 was not only a day that will live in infamy, but the reason he and his family stayed in Brooklyn until after WWII before returning to California.

Growing up in an immigrant melting pot in Brooklyn helped prepare him for the polyglot population at Ells and Kennedy High Schools in Richmond. Richmond High had over 3,600 students and diversity was the norm. The school had a bell tower with a huge classroom underneath -- the forensics room. In a school of 3,600, David felt that having a “home” was important and that having a dynamic, caring forensics coach, Frances Byrnes, was the turning point of his life, “She did more to prepare me for UC Berkeley than all the other courses and teachers I had.” After graduating from Berkeley in 1960, he went to Boalt Law School, in spite of his real desire to teach debate. His parents wanted their son to be a lawyer, and his friends warned him that teaching pay was poor. However, his heart told him that he could do more good training young minds to communicate than he would do as a lawyer. Fortunately for his students, he went with his heart.

Common mythology once told us that you could not have an outstanding forensics’ program at an urban, inner-city, comprehensive high school. But David was determined to prove the prophets of failure wrong. He was once scolded by a famous private school coach for bringing too many teams to a debate tournament. But his philosophy centered on the concept that his students would learn by competing and that any activity that was academically challenging should involve as many students as possible. Kennedy High would regularly enter twenty to thirty debate teams and seventy to a hundred individual entries at league tournaments. He would always claim, “We never stressed winning but always preached that each student should try to improve and learn from each round of competition.” To serve this large number, he would raise from \$25,000 to \$50,000 a year. He was often called “Mr. Donut” because of the donut stand outside of his classroom, but they raised the money necessary so all students could afford to travel.



During Dansky’s tenure, the Kennedy High team won three State Tournaments. They also earned many individual championship awards. David served as NFL District Chairman for fifteen years and Kennedy High was frequently one of the largest programs in the nation. David retired in 1988 an inductee of both the CHSSA (1990) and NFL (1991) Halls of Fame. In speaking of his career, David feels that, “My greatest sense of accomplishment derives from the successes of so many of my students in the academic, professional and political world and these were often the students who did not get the big trophies but who learned the skills required for a successful like. I have stayed in contact with many of my former students. These contacts are far more rewarding than any jury award could ever have been.....I made the right choice.”