

SportsLetter Interviews

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Eric Sondheimer

Eric Sondheimer has been a sportswriter since 1976, when he began as a stringer for the Los Angeles Daily News. Currently, he writes a twice-a-week column for the Los Angeles Times.

With the exception of a stint with the short-lived National Sports Daily newspaper, Sondheimer has devoted his career to one subject: the high school sports scene in Southern California.

From Santa Barbara to San Diego, the region has long produced its share of collegiate, Olympic and professional athletes; according to a recent article in USA Today, Long Beach's Polytechnic High School is tied with Concord's De La Salle High School (located in Northern California) for producing the most 2007 NFL players, with six each.



In his role as the dean of high school sports journalists, Sondheimer has interviewed stars in every sport — from John Elway to Marion Jones to Bret Saberhagen — long before they became nationally known. In addition, he's witnessed first-hand the myriad changes in prep sports — including the increased importance of the AAU and summer-league teams, the rise in popularity of private coaches, and the present-day exhaustive media coverage via television and the Internet.

Sondheimer has earned numerous journalism awards in his career. In 1988, he was part of a reporting team honored by the Associated Press for breaking the story of the University of Kentucky basketball program having sent money to a high school recruit. In 1998, the Los Angeles Press Club honored him as outstanding sports columnist. In 2007, he received the best column award from the California Prep Sports Writers Association.

Sondheimer is also the co-author (with Fred Eisenhammer) of the book “College Football’s Most Memorable Games, 1913 Through 1990: The Stories of 54 History-Making Contests” (McFarland).

SportsLetter recently spoke with Sondheimer at the LA84 Foundation offices in Los Angeles.

— David Davis

SportsLetter: Have you always lived in Southern California?

Eric Sondheimer: I was born in North Hollywood and I’ve lived in the [San Fernando] Valley all my life. I went to school in the area — Madison Junior High, Poly High in Sun Valley and then Cal State Northridge.

SL: How did you get into sports writing?

ES: I was in junior high and I got cut from the basketball team. So, to stay involved in sports, I started writing for the school newspaper. I found that that gave me far more influence than playing for the team.

As soon as I graduated from Poly in 1976, I started covering high school football games for the Daily News, as a stringer. Then, I was a part timer at the Daily News while I was going to Cal State Northridge.

I almost left journalism for PR. When I was graduating from Cal State Northridge, I applied for and was offered the job of the school’s sports information director. I accepted the job, but I wanted to stay in newspapers. So, I went to the Daily News and got them to offer me a full-time job. I stayed with them until The National came along.

SL: How did you end up working at The National?

ES: The sports editor at the Daily News, Steve Clow, was hired to run the West Coast bureau for The National. It was a new operation and nobody knew how long it would last. I finally got convinced that it would be best for my career to see how I would be challenged. They were hiring the very

best sportswriters around the globe. Also, the money was great.

Of course, *The National* lasted only 18 months. They never could figure out how to make money or sell ads. But it was a great newspaper, and I learned a lot. I started out as the West Coast correspondent — I was going to write a column for them — and the job evolved to where I did a lot of different sports, from the Lakers to UCLA.

It was good experience for me to cover the pros and the colleges a little bit because I've mainly focused on high schools. That's the only time I didn't cover the high schools, although I did write some of those stories for *The National*. I wrote a story about Tiger Woods — a high school phenom to watch. I remember his father introducing me to him on the golf course.

SL: Why didn't *The National* last longer?

ES: It was a great idea, and a lot of what they did has endured. They started the extended box scores that have now become common. The writing was great, and the columns were excellent. I don't think it was the product that didn't work. It was the failure to develop ways to market and sell the paper. I mean, it was great for people going on the subway in New York City, but they couldn't figure out home delivery in other parts of the country.

I was very fortunate because, when *The National* collapsed, the *Daily News* was nice enough to hire me back. They welcomed me back, and I went back to the high school beat.

SL: Why did you decide to keep covering the high schools?

ES: Very few people in journalism stay doing high school sports. They use it as a springboard because they think it's the bottom floor. To me, it's not the bottom. It's some of the greatest stories that you're ever going to have. It's an opportunity to make your greatest impact. I mean, do you want to be one of 100 people writing about Kobe Bryant, or do you want to be the one person to write about somebody who's going to be a great player down the road?

To me, it was an easy choice. Especially in L.A., because there are so many tremendous athletes who are our future Olympians or Major Leaguers or NBA players. I get a chance to see them before they come to the public spotlight.

SL: You jumped to the Los Angeles Times in 1997: was that a difficult decision to make?

ES: It was a difficult time for the Daily News. They were going through ownership change, and there were all sorts of problems at the paper. The Times offered a chance to go some place where people were going to help me do things, rather than me doing everything myself. So, I made that jump.

SL: How has your job changed at the Times?

ES: When I first went to the Times, the paper was expanding its Valley edition. Back then I just covered high school sports in the Valley. In 2001, the Times changed how they covered high school sports, and now I go all over Southern California. It helps that I have a Prius because I can use the carpool lanes.

Going to the Times has worked out great because it's challenged me as a journalist. I have to be careful to find stories that resonate not just within that particular local area, but all over L.A., from San Luis Obispo to Mission Viejo, from the Valley to Palmdale. That's a difficult task, but I enjoy that.

SL: How do you find the stories that you write about?

ES: Sometimes, I get an e-mail from a coach or a fan or a parent suggesting a story. Sometimes, the story comes from an observation I make reporting at an event and talking with people. The key is to try to find stories that resonate — whether it's teaching a lesson that other people can understand or it's an athlete who's going to be a great player down the road. Yesterday, I was out at El Segundo High School to do a story about a quarterback [Michael Bundy] who throws a football left-handed, but throws a baseball right-handed. That was suggested by a friend of the family.

It's important to get out and see games. That way, you can use your own instincts. When I go to football games, I don't just talk to the football coach. I try to check in with the basketball coach and the baseball coach — whoever's there — because a lot of news in other sports happens in the off-season. For example, I wrote a story this week on a freshman basketball player [Brea Olinda High School's Kyle Caudill] who's one of the tallest players in the state.

SL: So, on Friday nights during the fall, you're always at a high school football game?

ES: That's right. I'm covering a game for the Times. And, I'm looking for column ideas.

SL: Is it difficult to cover the entire gamut of high school sports?

ES: Besides football, I do a lot of basketball and baseball. I don't do a lot of soccer, though soccer is one of the fastest-growing sports. So, I have to force myself to learn more about soccer. The key is, the story has to be interesting. It doesn't matter whether it's boys or girls, although boys get the primary coverage. I've tried to involve more girls' sports, but it's a real difficult task. In general, there's not much women's sports in the paper.

SL: You've covered everyone from John Elway to Jimmy Clausen as preps. Who was the most impressive prep athlete you've covered?

ES: No question, it was John Elway. It was amazing: I started out covering high school sports with the greatest prep athlete I'll probably ever see. I'd never seen an arm like his, and I'll never see one again. I always laugh when people compare high school kids to John Elway. That's ridiculous. You can't do that. It's not fair to the kids, and it's not accurate. He's once-in-a-lifetime.

For the high school level, Russell White [from Crespi Carmelite High School] was as good as there ever was. He ended up going to Cal, and then didn't do well in the pros, but that doesn't take away from how great he was in high school.

There've been so many good baseball players because I covered the Valley for 25 years: Bret Saberhagen, Jeff Suppan, Jack McDowell. This last year, there were two first-round draft picks out of Chatsworth High [Mike Moustakas and Matt Dominguez].

I mentioned Tiger Woods before [Woods attended Western High School in Anaheim]. I also covered Marion Jones when she was at Thousand Oaks.

SL: Who's the current "it" athlete in the area?

ES: [Basketball star] Renardo Sidney. It'll be interesting to see how he does after transferring to Fairfax High. He'll have to deal with all the competition in the City Section. And, as a junior, he'll have pressure building from college recruiters. So, it'll be interesting to see how he deals with that.

SL: Have you covered athletes who you thought of as "can't-miss" prospects for college or the pros, but they fizzled?

ES: Yes, definitely. In baseball, it's a lot easier to make predictions about pitchers than hitters. I've messed up many times on position players saying, "This guy's going to be a Major Leaguer." But I haven't messed up as much when they're pitchers because I look for guys who throw strikes and who have good mound presence.

It's so difficult for position players to make the Major Leagues. Like, Ryan Braun, from Granada Hills, has become a rookie-of-the-year candidate [as the third baseman for the Milwaukee Brewers]. I thought he had great ability and deserved a college scholarship, but I never thought he would burst on the scene like he has. Miami was smart enough to give him a scholarship, and UCLA didn't. To this day, I don't understand that. I think it was one of [manager] Gary Adams' biggest mistakes.

In football, people are always saying, "This guy will play on Saturday or Sunday." Like, with [quarterback] Jimmy Clausen. I'll take some responsibility for helping to create the Jimmy Clausen image, since I wrote about him when he was in junior high. But I also warned people about him — that he was playing at a small school [Oaks Christian School] and that

he needed an opportunity to have a transition period at college. And, it's showing right now at [the University of] Notre Dame.

SL: What's the best high school rivalry that you cover?

ES: Crespi-Notre Dame has always been one of the great rivalries. San Fernando-Sylmar has been a great one, and so has Mater Dei-Servite.

SL: Of the thousands of games you've covered, which game is the most memorable?

ES: I've seen so many games that it's hard to remember them all, but probably the playoff game between Palisades and Granada Hills, with John Elway against Jay Schroeder, two future Super Bowl quarterbacks. The game went into overtime, and Granada Hills won on a California tiebreaker.

SL: What do you like most about covering high school sports?

ES: Just that you can make an impact with your stories. It's a great opportunity to tell stories about athletes who are mostly good people trying to do well in sports and in school. I look for positive stories about people doing well in school or overcoming adversity. Like, I'm writing a story about a linebacker from Garfield High [David Lopez] whose father has diabetes and has lost both his legs. He's trying to get a Division I scholarship.

It's also getting the chance to see teenagers before they become college or pro players. And, that's always been the fun part — the allure — of doing this beat: to find the guys that people don't know about. Through all my years, I've covered the Super Bowl, the World Series, the NBA Championships, all of horse racing's big races. I've done all that, and those are fun. But I've always stayed with high schools because, number one, it's been important for the newspapers I've worked with that they have a presence at the high school level and, number two, it's a challenge to find the next great talented kid.

SL: Do you cover high school sports in the same way that you covered the pros or the colleges?

ES: As a reporter who covers high school sports, I write differently than I would do with the colleges or the pros. I don't believe in criticizing a high school student or coach, because they're there for education first. I very rarely do it. Last year, with the press conference that Jimmy Clausen gave, that was one of the few times I've ever done that. I felt that he went over the line, by showing up in a Hummer limousine with four rings that he said he was going to win at Notre Dame. I criticized him about that, and his family hasn't talked with me since. But we have to be careful. We have a responsibility to treat high school athletes differently than college or pro athletes. Some of the younger sportswriters don't understand that.

SL: How has the prep scene changed over the years?

ES: There's a lot more emphasis on scholarships, and there's a lot more pressure on the kids to gain scholarships. I don't know whether that's coming from the kids themselves or their parents or their coaches. But they want to get a scholarship, and now they're hiring private coaches to help them get this.

There's also a lot more club teams involved. We're getting to the point now where they debate what's more important: high school sports or club sports? In certain sports, that debate is already over. The club sports have become more important to get a college scholarship in soccer, girls' volleyball, and softball. It's headed that way in basketball. It hasn't gotten to football because, thank goodness, nobody's figured out a way to create a club program for football.

With basketball, it's become so difficult to cover the sport because there's so much recruiting and transferring going on. Kids transfer schools just to get a scholarship or to win a championship. A lot of these transfers are unwarranted or unethical. It's not what high school sports are supposed to be about.

SL: Is it just basketball?

ES: Basketball is the sport that has become the biggest abuser. I think it has to do with the fact that there's so much money involved, with endorsements from the shoe companies and the chance to be in the NBA.

So, you see all these people doing this, with the same schools getting these transfers over and over. I feel so sorry for the coaches who have stuck it out. They finally get one good player, and then they leave. But that's the way things are now. Kids can go to any school they want. The neighborhood schools have lost out.

SL: Speaking of basketball, the NBA recently changed its rules to restrict high school players from jumping to the pros. What's your opinion of this?

ES: I like the rule. I think it's a good idea for the top players to spend a year in college. When they didn't have the rule, there were all these players who weren't good enough for the NBA putting their names into the draft. It was embarrassing. There was a kid, Ellis Richardson, from my alma mater who put his name into the draft, and he didn't even get a college scholarship. The rule stops chaos from happening.

This year, things'll be interesting in L.A. We have two of the best freshman college players in Kevin Love [at UCLA] and O.J. Mayo [at USC]. We'll see how many classes each of them takes or whether they're planning to go pro after one season.

SL: You've written a lot about the issue of transferring. How has the CIF [the California Interscholastic Federation, the governing body of high school sports in the state] transfer rules changed over the years?

ES: They were tough and then it became too easy to transfer. There was a point a couple of years ago, when open enrollment came in, where you could go to another school without moving and be eligible immediately. It was a joke. It was designed to help people for academic reasons but, as usual, loopholes came about and people were transferring for athletic reasons. They've since strengthened the rules somewhat.

When somebody transfers for athletic reasons, I don't like it. There's a running back out of St. Bonaventure named Darrell Scott. He left Moorpark High after last season. He never gave a reason. He had a great coach, great teammates. He just left to play for a better offensive line, in my opinion. That's not a good example being set, and I don't think that's what high school sports is all about. That's just my personal opinion.

I think the rules need to be tough. High school is about preparing yourself for adulthood. It's not designed as an athletic experience. Yes, I understand that there are good teams and bad programs — Mater Dei is always going to be better than my alma mater, Sun Valley Poly. And, parents have a right to pick wherever they think it's best for their children to go to school. But, you shouldn't be able to go from school to school, and there are people who have gone to three different schools for coaching or playing time or whatever. That's not the way it was designed, and it affects the other kids on the teams.

They're trying to find a balance. The state recently put in a new rule that says, if you transfer to a school where your former coach went or your club coach went, you're ineligible for one year — even if you move. I think that's good, but that hasn't been tested yet in the courts. The first test case may involve the situation at Van Nuys High, after four basketball players left Sylmar High to join their former coach at Van Nuys.

SL: Do you think that the CIF is doing its job?

ES: In general, I think the CIF is doing a good job. There's so many different sections — I believe there's ten sections — and everybody's got their own likes and dislikes. For the most part, they seem to be handling it well.

I'm not so certain about all the hoopla about the state championships. We're different from everybody else. We're not like Indiana, where everybody focuses on the state championships, rather than the section championships. For whatever reason, in California, people believe that winning the section title means more than winning the state title. So, you don't see the excitement at the state basketball finals. With football, it wasn't like they sold out the Home Depot Center. I don't think we'll ever see that level of interest because we're such a big state and we have so many other entertainment things to do.

My concern is that they're trying to build up the state championships as the biggest deal — which I understand, because they get some of the money — but I just don't think it'll ever come to the point of being like a Texas or Indiana or Pennsylvania. My concern is that it's going to take

away from other things.

I do see some improvement in sportsmanship, with the “Character Counts” program from Michael Josephson that was introduced a few years ago. Administrators are taking this more seriously because both the Southern Section and the City Section are involved with “Character Counts.” And, they’re punishing people that abuse that more quickly.

SL: In Texas and Florida, they’re starting to test for steroids among high school athletes. Do you think they should test in California?

ES: It would be great if they tested, but from a monetary standpoint I don’t see that happening. California is not going to pay for it. Maybe individual schools will decide to pay for it.

SL: Have you seen much evidence of performance-enhancing use?

ES: Is it happening? I would say yes. Anything that’s going on in the college and pro level is probably happening at the high school level.

A couple of years ago, I got a tip that two high school football players went to Mexico to buy steroids. We did a Freedom of Information Act request, and we could show that their car was in Mexico. But we still didn’t prove that they did it, and they denied it. The school did nothing because they could not prove anything beyond that threshold.

I think the coaches need to take responsibility about this. They’re with the kids every day. They should know when their kids are on steroids. There are signs. Every year, the coaches should have a talk with the players. They should lay down the law that, if they see someone showing signs of steroid use, they’re kicked off the team.

SL: How has media coverage of prep sports changed over the years?

ES: It used to be that the Daily News and the other local newspapers were the only ones covering high school sports 30 years ago. For the Daily News, covering high school sports was always very important. That’s what local newspapers are about. The Times did maybe a weekly article,

based on their regionalized coverage.

Now, you see all the papers getting more into the high school scene. That's why I left for the Times, because they decided they were going to make it important. Giving me a column, that tells me it's important to them.

The biggest change has been the Internet. You can put as much stuff as you want on the Internet, and it doesn't cost you anything except manpower. There's a limit in newspapers — there's a space limit. I go to high school games now, and the sidelines are crowded with people with cameras, trying to do things for the Internet.

There's going to be a lot of this in the future because so much media coverage of the high schools is being generated via the Internet. The Times has decided, in the last couple of years, that the Internet is where we're going to cover high school sports. In some ways, that makes a lot of sense: Young people get their news online. They do not read newspapers.

This year, we've started using blogs. All the writers are also bloggers. It started out with, like, 7,000 hits. Then, it was 10,000. This week, it's up to 20,000. The high school blogs have become the third-most popular blog on the L.A. Times' sports site and are one of the top blogs in the whole paper.

So, there's an interest out there. I think we're still trying to figure out how to best use the Internet. At the [Orange County] Register, they're using video on the web. They go out and blog games and take video. We're behind on that at the Times.

SL: How do you think the Times is doing with its coverage of high school sports, between the Internet and the newspaper?

ES: It's gotten better. This year is the first year we have a full page for football. We didn't have one last year. I think we're doing a good job on the Internet. It's gaining in popularity every week. We're trying to come up with a plan for the future, and I applaud the editors at the paper for trying to deal with the future now. We waited too long.

SL: How has television coverage of high school sports changed?

ES: Television coverage has picked up amazingly. When LeBron James was a high school senior, ESPN televised one of his games. That became one of their highest-rated games. That's what changed the whole complexion, and the other national networks started to do games. You also have more cable outlets than ever before. FSN does games, and LA36 does city games now.

The networks are tying this into college sports. I noticed when ESPN2 was doing the recent Birmingham-Notre Dame game, the promo ended by saying that the Notre Dame High quarterback [Dayne Crist] was going to go to the University of Notre Dame and the Birmingham High running back [Milton Knox] was going to UCLA. So, that's how they draw in other viewers.

You're going to see more and more high school sports on television. There's probably going to be a high school sports network in the next 10 years because television is all about finding a specialized audience.

SL: How has all of this affected the kids? Are they more media-savvy today than they were 30 years ago?

ES: For the big-time kids who are getting heavily recruited, this has definitely made them more media-savvy. As a matter of fact, some of them give me canned quotes, like they've been coached how to talk with the media. You see others post their videos on YouTube.

We've gotten to the point where kids can become stars in high school. When I went out to talk with Jimmy Clausen last year, Oaks Christian had hired security guards for the games. They had to kick people off the sidelines. I was so upset: this is what things have come to. This year, it was back to normal. All the people are gone because Jimmy Clausen is gone.

I think a lot of people forget what the high school sports experience is all about. It's more than just trying to be on television and win championships. It's about giving people an opportunity to play sports.

SL: When you're working on stories, how much are you aware of the college recruiting angle?

ES: Well, I'm responsible for doing part of the "Recruiting Buzz" for our blog, so I'm always on the lookout for the next phenom. The college recruiting angle is involved in nearly every story I do. For the most part, I don't write about high school athletes who are going to give up sports at the end of the year. That's not what the majority of our readers want to read about. They want to know about the top athletes and what college they're going to go to.

SL: What's the audience for college-recruiting stories?

ES: It's amazing how many people follow recruiting. It's not just the high school people, but the college people. USC and UCLA fans want to know who are going to be the future Trojans and Bruins. I mean, Scouts.com, which is a recruiting website, got sold for tens of millions of dollars.

To show you the interest, I wrote a four-inch story on the website about [basketball guard] Jrue Holiday, from Campbell Hall High [in North Hollywood], committing to UCLA. Within an hour, that came up as the third most-read story on the site. When I wrote a little story that Dayne Crist had committed to play at [the University of] Notre Dame, it became one of the top-five most-read stories in the paper.

SL: Your older brother, Michael Sondheimer, works at UCLA. Do you guys trade information about high school prospects?

ES: This issue always comes up because he helps coordinate the recruiting for all the sports at UCLA except for football. Obviously, there's a potential for a conflict of interest. But he's very careful because he knows that he could get in trouble. He's not going to call me up and say: "Hey, this guy just committed here." But he's also one of the best in the business at what he does. I'd be a fool not to take advantage of that and run story ideas by him from time to time.

SL: How have the AAU teams and the summer leagues changed the dynamics of high school sports?

ES: As I mentioned before, in certain sports they've become the most important part of the athletic experience. In soccer, college coaches only recruit based on what a kid has done with the clubs. Same with softball and girls' volleyball — and probably with water polo. These kids don't have to play high school sports to get a scholarship. Some don't: we're seeing soccer players leave their high school teams.

There's still examples of kids being discovered on their high school teams. But that's rare now. Even football is affected: they have these combines the kids go to that function like the club experience. They're being spotted and timed and measured.

SL: Not to drag Jimmy Clausen into another part of this interview, but when John Elway played sports in high school, he played baseball and football. Clausen only played football in high school, despite being a pretty fair baseball player. Do more of today's high school athletes specialize in one sport or even one position?

ES: Definitely. We're in the age of specialization. There are some smaller schools that rely on multiple-sports athletes. Good for them. But for the most part, there's this crazy notion that you have to play or practice your sport 24 hours a day to get a college scholarship. That's not true. Sure, if you can practice something, you'll get better at it. But college coaches also like multiple-sports athletes. You can work on skills in basketball that will help you in football, and vice versa.

I'm doing a story on this cross-country runner at Birmingham [Waldo Jimenez]. He was a soccer player all his life. He went out for track last year, and now he might win a city championship in cross country in his first year because he was able to discover another talent.

SL: Speaking of the trend in specialization, how do you feel about the rise of private coaches in high school sports?

ES: Well, if parents have the extra money, I don't see any reason why they shouldn't try to help their son or daughter be good at something. It's been going on for years in tennis and golf. Now, it's gotten to other sports like baseball, football and basketball.

There's nothing wrong with it as long as the kids and the parents understand that the high school coaches should be the real authority, with the private coaches as supplement. Because once you get into a fight between the two camps — say, the private coach is teaching the kid how to throw the football a certain way — then you're going to have a problem.

SL: How about the parents: has their participation changed since you've been on the beat?

ES: We still have problems with parents not behaving properly at sporting events because of officiating. That hasn't changed much.

With recruiting, some parents are aware of what's happening. Others are out of it and don't understand the recruiting process. That's too bad because everybody with a son or daughter who's going to be recruited needs to read up on this. It can get so complicated. Like, with the NCAA [academic] clearinghouse: people need to get their son or daughter enrolled quickly. A lot of people don't, and this comes back to haunt them when they try to play in college and they're declared ineligible.

SL: Title IX went into effect in 1972, but it didn't affect high school sports until a few years later. When did you start noticing changes in girls' sports?

ES: In the '90s, when girls' basketball started becoming better. It used to be, you'd have games that were, like, 100-22. You'd have great teams and terrible teams. You didn't have that with the boys. Now, there's far more balance because the girls are starting to play at a much younger age. It's evened out the teams and made it far more competitive. The quality of play is far better than it was in the '80s. And, it's going to continue to get better because they're like the boys: they work just as hard. In fact, they make far more free throws than the boys.

When you start playing at a young age — and you get better coaching and you have more opportunity via the club teams — you're going to get better. With soccer, basketball and softball, the level of play has gone way up. They've got great athletes.

SL: Do you spend more time covering girls' sports these days?

ES: Well, this is one of the big disappointments over at the Times. When we had regionalization, we had people to cover volleyball and softball in each section. Now, because we have one page and so little space in the paper, you have to pick and choose. It's tough, but football always gets the space.

So, it's a concern that I think the Times has to be aware of: What are we going to do with girls' sports? Are they going to get lost because we have less space and fewer reporters?

SL: What about so-called alternative sports like surfing? How much coverage do they get?

ES: All the alternative sports are coming up. There's interest in skateboarding and surfing. That's why the X Games have become so popular. We cover that real well, but then we don't cover the alternative sports that much during the rest of the year.

In the newspaper, there's a space problem. People send e-mails asking me, "When are you going to start covering lacrosse?" Well, where are we going to put that in the paper? If we cover that, then what are we not going to cover?

SL: How do you see the future for high school sports?

ES: There are real concerns. Will high school sports become like a minor-league feeder system? Or, will they stay available for anybody and everybody? It's at a point where I don't know where it's going to go. I don't know how much bigger it's going to be. But it's going to get bigger.

If you go out and see Mater Dei's new gym, it looks like a college gym. There's a lot of money out there, with a lot of people fund-raising. There's a lot of opportunities to make high school athletic programs like a college or professional program.

In the future, you may see the development of small schools designed just for athletes. You already see that in Florida, with the Bollettieri academy. I think you'll see these more of these specialized schools for athletic purposes.

SL: How about the future of high school sports in Los Angeles?

ES: Well, more schools are now being built throughout L.A. Unified. For many years, there were only 49 high schools in L.A. Unified. Now, with their building program, they're adding something like 37 high schools by 2012. If you include the charter and magnet schools, they're up to 94. That's going to affect the way the playoffs are run and how schools will compete.

L.A. has changed so much. In the summertime, there was a story that said approximately 80 percent of L.A. County is going to be Hispanic and Asian by the year 2050. So, L.A. is changing, and I'm going to try to present these stories.