

1 **BEFORE AN APPEAL PANEL OF THE**  
2 **CALIFORNIA INTERSCHOLASTIC FEDERATION**

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5 In Re:

6 Coronado Unified School District’s Appeal of  
7 June 30, 2021 Decision and Sanctions Issued  
8 by the California Interscholastic Federation  
9 Executive Director.

**DECISION OF THE APPEAL PANEL**

**Date of Hearing: November 1, 2021**  
**Location: Zoom**

**Panel Chair: Monica Colunga**  
**Panel Members: John Becker; Marty Bitter**

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11 **I. INTRODUCTION**

12 A California Interscholastic Federation (“CIF”), state level appeal was requested by the  
13 Coronado Unified School District (“CUSD”) in response to the June 30, 2021 Decision and  
14 Sanctions Issued by the California Interscholastic Federation Executive Director in which the  
15 Executive Director found that Coronado High School (“Coronado”) violated CIF Constitution  
16 Article 1 Section 12.B and Article 2 Sections 22.B.3-4 and B.9 as well as Game Management  
17 guidelines 1, 2 and 5. The Executive Director’s findings were in part based upon that on June 19,  
18 2021, shortly after the conclusion of the Southern California Regional Boys Basketball  
19 Championship game between Coronado and Orange Glen High School (“Orange Glen”), members  
20 of the Coronado basketball team threw tortillas in the direction of the Orange Glen team and staff.

21 As a result on the findings, the Executive Director issued the following sanctions:

- 22 1. The 2021 Southern California Boys Basketball Division 4-A Regional  
23 Championship is vacated.  
24  
25 2. Coronado High School is on probation for the 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-  
26 2024 school years.  
27  
28 3. The Coronado High School boys basketball team will not host postseason contests  
at the Section, Regional, or State levels for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years.



1 Council and Executive Committee and is the Athletic Director for the Madera Unified School  
2 District.

3 John Becker, Appeal Panel Member for the hearing is a member of the CIF Federated  
4 Council and Executive Committee and is the Superintendent of Schools for the Roseville Joint  
5 Union High School District.

6 **B. APPEARANCES & WITNESSES**

7 At the hearing, CUSD appeared through legal counsel Daniel Shinoff and Jeffery Wade.  
8 The Executive Director appeared through legal counsel J. Scott Donald. Ronald J. Scholar,  
9 appeared as Legal Advisor to the Appeal Panel. Legal Counsel presented opening and closing  
10 arguments.

11 CUSD called David Sobel, a private investigator retained by CUSD legal counsel, Brad  
12 Couture, a teacher and coach at Coronado and Karl Mueller, CUSD Superintendent as testifying  
13 witnesses. Ron Nocetti, CIF Executive Director, testified on behalf of his office.

14 **C. DOCUMENTS**

15 Pursuant to prior directives issued by the Appeal Panel Chair on behalf of the Appeal  
16 Panel, both CUSD and the Executive Director previously exchanged and submitted their  
17 documents for the Appeal Hearing.

18 Coronado submitted documents marked A0001 through and including A0732

19 The Executive Director submitted documents marked R0001 through and including R0070.

20 These documents were received into the record and were reviewed and considered by the  
21 Appeal Panel.

22 This matter was originally scheduled for hearing on September 27, 2021. Following an  
23 inadvertent omission of documents by the Executive Director which resulted in the production of  
24 additional documents on September 22, 2021, the Appeal Panel vacated the hearing date and on  
25 September 27, 2021, held a scheduling conference with the parties via Zoom. The Appeal Panel  
26 decided to accept the additional documents from the Executive Director, re-set the hearing to  
27 November 1, 2021 and granted CUSD the opportunity to submit rebuttal documents which it did  
28 on October 18, 2021. CUSD also submitted a one page document the day of the hearing,



1 interscholastic athletic programs among and between schools.

2 C. As a condition of membership in the CIF, schools must agree to abide by all current  
3 rules and regulations of the State CIF and the CIF section. Additionally, local school boards or  
4 boards of directors are required to adopt the 16 Principles of Pursuing Victory with Honor by  
5 board resolution and both the school administration and coaching staff of each member school are  
6 required to monitor their athletic programs and report any offense to the CIF. (See CIF Const. Art.  
7 2, Section 22.)

8 D. Article 2, Section 22.C(1) of the CIF Constitution states as follows:

9 “The Executive Director and/or Executive Committee or Section Commissioner and/or  
10 Section Board of Managers shall have power to suspend, to fine or otherwise penalize any member  
11 school for the violation of any CIF or Section rules and regulations or for just cause. The period of  
12 suspension or other penalty shall be left to the discretion of the CIF governing body that has  
13 jurisdiction of the matter where the penalty is not fixed.”

#### 14 IV. FINDINGS

15 1. On June 19, 2021, Coronado played Orange Glen in 2021 Southern California Boys  
16 Basketball Division 4-A Regional Championship.

17 2. The game was hosted by and at Coronado.

18 3. Prior to the game starting, Luke Serna, a Coronado graduate who was not officially  
19 affiliated with Coronado, brought four bags of tortillas to the game and into the gym. Mr. Serna  
20 was able to bring the tortillas into the Coronado gym because there were no required bag checks  
21 for people coming into the game. Mr. Serna approached both the Coronado cheerleaders and a  
22 basketball bench player. He told them that tortillas were thrown at UC Santa Barbara games in  
23 celebration. The bench player accepted the tortillas. Some were also left with the cheerleaders but  
24 were gathered by the cheer advisor. There was no evidence that the cheer advisor for Coronado  
25 did any further investigation or took any further action. (A0571; A0707-0710; Sobel Testimony)

26 4. Mr. Serna informed Coronado Head Boys Basketball Coach Laaperi, who Mr.  
27 Serna knew from Santa Barbara he was going to bring the tortillas to the game. Coach Laaperi  
28 “kinda chuckled but didn’t have any concern with it.” (A0214) Mr. Serna also stated that he

1 wanted to come forward with information earlier and be more transparent but did not because  
2 Coach Laaperi “really didn’t want it out there” and “wanted to keep things closer to the vest.”  
3 (A0215) The two also exchanged text messages regarding the tortillas. (Sobel Testimony)

4 5. During the game, there were instances of inappropriate behavior with some of the  
5 game’s attendees. Whether or not appropriate action was taken by Coronado staff is disputed.  
6 (R0037; R0040; R0042; R0044; R0048; R0053; A706)

7 6. The game ended in overtime on a last second shot scored by Coronado. The shot  
8 was taken from the end of the floor opposite the Orange Glen bench. (R0037; Video)

9 7. The Coronado players were understandably elated and celebrated while Orange  
10 Glen players and staff were standing quietly near their bench. As Coronado celebrated, they  
11 moved towards mid-court and the side of the court closest to the Orange Glen bench. As the  
12 Coronado group approached the area near the Orange Glen bench at what appeared to be the  
13 opportunity for both sides to shake hands in a show of sportsmanship, Coronado Coach Laaperi  
14 yelled to Orange Glen Coach Featherly “[t]hat’s why you don’t talk shit, get your kids and get the  
15 fuck out of here losers!” Coach Featherly yelled back at Coach Laaperi “[t]hat was a great game  
16 and you wrecked a great game! JD, hey JD! You are a piece of shit.” (R0037; R0039; R0041;  
17 R0044; R0048; R0050; R0052; A0723; Video; Sobel and Couture Testimony.)

18 8. After the Coaches exchanged words and while adults began yelling and pushing  
19 each other, two Coronado basketball players threw tortillas in the direction of Orange Glen  
20 players, coaches and staff. (R0038; R0039; R0041; R0044; R0047; R0052; R0055; A0707-0710;  
21 Video; Sobel Testimony; Couture Testimony) One of the tortillas struck Coach Featherly in the  
22 face. (R0039)

23 9. The Coronado student-athletes who threw the tortillas have subsequently stated that  
24 they did not have any racist intent in throwing the tortillas. (A0707-0708.)

25 10. On June 20, 2021, CUSD Superintendent Mueller issued a Media Statement where  
26 he stated in part that the “altercation and unsportsmanlike conduct which included throwing  
27 tortillas at our visitors from Orange Glen” was “reprehensible.” Superintendent Mueller  
28 apologized to the Orange Glen community and promised swift action and accountability. He also

1 stated “[w]e have a commitment to stand against any act of bias.” (R0033; A0209)

2 11. On June 20, 2021, Lee Pontes, CUSD Board President issued an email on behalf of  
3 the entire Board which in part stated the following: “On June 19, 2021, following a championship  
4 basketball game, members of the Coronado community hurled tortillas at students from Orange  
5 Glen High School, a predominantly Latino school district. The Trustees of the Coronado Unified  
6 School District acknowledge these acts to be egregious, demeaning, and disrespectful. We fully  
7 condemn the racism, classism, and colorism which fueled the actions of the perpetrators and fully  
8 support the statement by Superintendent Mueller released earlier this morning.” (R0069)

9 12. Over the weekend following the game, Coach Laaperi tweeted: “Unfortunately a  
10 community member brought tortillas and distributed them which was unacceptable and racist in  
11 nature. I do not condone this behavior. Coronado High School does not condone this behavior and  
12 is already taking appropriate action. (R0025)

13 13. On June 21, 2021, Executive Director Nocetti sent a letter to Superintendent  
14 Mueller stating that it was his understanding that CUSD was having an emergency board meeting  
15 on June 22, 2021 to address the incident and to forward to the CIF State Office CUSD’s  
16 investigatory report and/or findings for review by 3:00 p.m. on June 23, 2021. Executive Director  
17 Nocetti also wrote that given the seriousness of the matter, the CIF was seeking to reach a  
18 conclusion on the matter by June 24, 2021. (A0211)

19 14. On June 25, 2021, Superintendent Mueller sent a letter to CIF Executive Director  
20 Nocetti wherein he wrote in part: “The first person accounts and the videos show that the two  
21 student participants threw the tortillas only after the adults around the scorers’ table, representing  
22 both OGHS and CHS, escalated tensions by using profanities and insults instead of modeling good  
23 sportsmanship.” “There is no denying that the incident caused offense and subjected our guests  
24 and Coronado residents present to feelings related to discrimination. We cannot diminish what  
25 transpired or the significance of the interpretation of the tortillas.” Superintendent Mueller also  
26 stated that there was no factual basis to justify forfeiting the game. (R0029-0030; A2017-0219;  
27 Mueller Testimony)

28 15. Executive Director Nocetti issued his decision on June 30, 2021. (R0010-0016)



1 bringing the tortillas. Coach Laaperi also failed to address the matter in advance with Coronado  
2 administration or his players. Instead, he just let it happen. His behavior before the game is belied  
3 by the tweet he issued after the incident wherein he feigned ignorance and acknowledged the  
4 conduct was “unacceptable and racist in nature” despite that fact it was conduct he had just  
5 previously condoned.

6 Fourth, the self-serving, subjective intent of the students who actually threw the tortillas,  
7 while relevant, does not override or supersede the actual impact of the action and the reasonable  
8 interpretation of it which must also be considered and weighed. Here, CUSD Superintendent  
9 Mueller referred to the throwing of the tortillas as “reprehensible” and as an act of “bias” stating  
10 that “[t]here is no denying that the incident caused offense and subjected our guests and Coronado  
11 residents present to feelings related to discrimination. We cannot diminish what transpired or the  
12 significance of the interpretation of the tortillas.” The CUSD Board referred to it as “...egregious,  
13 demeaning, and disrespectful” and “...fully condemn[ed] the racism, classism, and colorism...”  
14 involved. Thus, CUSD interpreted the incident the same way it was received by the Orange Glen  
15 community. Even without CUSD’s interpretation, this Appeal Panel finds that the act of throwing  
16 the tortillas in this instance was both actually and reasonably interpreted as an act of racial animus.

17 Therefore, the basis for the issuance of sanctions by the CIF-SJS Commissioner are  
18 unanimously affirmed.

19 However, because the incident was focused solely on the boys basketball team the  
20 sanctions are modified as follows:

- 21 1. The 2021 Southern California Boys Basketball Division 4-A Regional  
22 Championship is vacated.
- 23 2. The Coronado High School boys basketball program is on probation for the 2021-  
24 2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024 school years.
- 25 3. The Coronado High School boys basketball program will not host postseason  
26 contests at the Section, Regional, or State levels for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years.  
27 However, upon completion of items 5 and 6 below, Coronado High School boys basketball  
28 program will be eligible to host postseason contests at the Section, Regional, or State levels for the

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2022-2023 school year.

4. Item 4 is vacated in its entirety.

5. Complete a sportsmanship workshop (to include a component of racial/cultural sensitivity training such as the NFHS Implicit Bias Course) by all Coronado High School athletic directors(s), boys basketball coaches and boys basketball student-athletes.

6. Complete a game management training program for all Coronado High School administrators and athletic director(s).

7. The administration at Coronado High School is strongly encouraged to engage with the administration at Orange Glen High School to develop a positive relationship between the two school communities. Examples may include the following:

a) The administrators at the two schools work cooperatively to provide the student-athletes at both schools with a restorative justice opportunity.

b) The administrators at the two schools work with a community-based non-profit organization to conduct community service projects with their student-athletes and coaches.

On behalf of the Appeal Panel

Dated: November 22, 2021

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Monica Colunga  
Chair and Presiding Appeal Panel Member  
CIF Federated Council and Executive Committee President