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## EDITORIALS

# A key victory for foster youth

It should not have taken a team of lawyers to allow Dalton Dyer and his Placer High teammates to participate in the Division IV playoffs. They earned it on the field.

But the combination of a California Interscholastic Federation bylaw that discriminated against foster youth - and the stubbornness of CIF officials - created a legal battle that forced the postponement of the opening round of the playoffs last weekend.

Fortunately, Superior Court Judge Judith Ford saw the inherent unfairness - and illegality - of the CIF's decision to cause Placer High to forfeit five games because it had not filled out the required paperwork for Dalton to become eligible for sports after moving from a foster home in Vallejo to his aunt's house in Auburn.

The requirement that foster youth prove their "hardship" to qualify for high school sports when they move to a new school is absurd and discriminatory. The CIF does not impose a similar barrier on an athlete who moves with his or her family. The ostensible purpose of the rule is to prevent schools from using sneaky means to stack their teams with star athletes.

But as John O'Toole, director of the National Center for Youth Law, explained, the rule shows an ignorance of "how foster care works." Young people in the foster



ASHLEY BAERI/Auburn Journal

**Back on track:** Judge clears the way for Dalton Dyer and his Placer High teammates to participate in the playoffs.

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care system - which the 16-year-old Dalton has been in since birth - are not allowed to move on their own. Such transfers must be approved by juvenile court judges.

The National Center for Youth Law took command of the case just last Wednesday, two days before the playoffs opened. Its three-lawyer team worked 18 to 20 hours a day on Dalton's behalf.

"Most of our cases take years and years," O'Toole said. "We got into this last Wednesday, it was resolved by Monday, and Dalton's going to be playing football Friday night - and we're all going."

While this ruling brings understandable disappointment to Colfax High, which lost to Placer in the regular season, all these hard feelings could have been avoided if CIF officials had not insisted on following the letter of a flawed rule. Pete Saco, commissioner of the Sac-Joaquin section, said he had no choice but to force the forfeitures for the five games Dalton played before his "hardship" paperwork was submitted and approved.

"You ever take a look at our constitution?" he asked, citing Rule 208.1.

If the California Interscholastic Federation has any sense, it will adjust its rules to reflect the reality of foster care - and the letter of state law, which trumps Rule 208.1 - before any more playoff games have to be settled in a courtroom instead of on the field.