

# Joe Lagnese

## CHSSA HALL OF FAME 1987



Joe Lagnese was coaching speech at Sweetwater High School in National City in 1949, long before the California High School Speech Association was organized. He attended his first of fourteen national tournaments in 1951. In 1954 and 1955 he was instrumental in organizing the Southern California NFL District. He earned three NFL coaching diamonds. During his career, he took a total of thirty-six students to national tournaments in humorous, extemp, oratory, debate, dramatic and congress.

In 1960, he hosted a national tournament in San Diego at the University of San Diego, and in the same year his team won the state tournament sweepstakes, including placing first in debate. His team again won the state tournament in 1963. He served as NFL district chairman ten times from 1955-1970. Joe was instrumental in the organization of CHSSA and served as its second president. These facts, while impressive, do not tell the total story of Joe Lagnese.

Joe was a great supporter of service clubs. He believed to have the community support needed to run a large speech program, you and your speakers had to be visible in the community. The list of service clubs for which his students spoke makes one wonder how they were able to prepare for the clubs and still do as well as they did in forensic competition.

In addition, Joe never neglected the San Diego/Imperial Valley League. His students always attended league tournaments and he was willing to help coaches maneuver the ins and outs of acquiring an NFL charter or mastering the tournament tab room. CHSSA Hall of Fame inductee Tom Roper, commented that Joe could shuffle debate cards faster and better than anyone he had ever seen, "What surprised everyone who watched him handle debate cards was that once the cards went down on the table, pairings very rarely needed to be moved."

Between 1949 and 1972, when he retired from coaching, he and his teams were the dominant force in the SDIVSL. Bob Sanders (Mt. Miguel) who won the state tournament sweepstakes in 1965, said that when he first came into the league in 1957 he told his students if they wanted to win they should follow the Sweetwater students and do what they did. He did the same thing with Joe. Within a short time Bob's students were doing very well.

Joseph G. Lagnese can truly be called the "father" of speech in San Diego and Imperial counties. He was also one of the founding fathers of the CHSSA and of the Southern California NFL District.

Without his leadership in the early years none of what is called speech in California would be the same today. After Joe's retirement from education in 1974, the SDIVSL named its "Best Speaker" trophy and scholarship at the state qualification tournament in his honor.

For his service to the California High School Speech Association and its students, Joe Lagnese was inducted in to the CHSSA Hall of Fame in 1987 as one of its founding members.

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