

# Sanford “Sandy” Berman

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CHSSA HALL OF FAME 1995



Sports and speech were the two activities that shaped Sandy Berman’s youth and his professional life. Sandy played varsity tennis and lettered in the sport during his freshman year at Lowell High School (SF). By age fourteen he was a ranked junior player and a certified official of the United State Lawn Tennis Association. Sandy was, however, surprised one September day to receive a transfer slip out of his English class into another class taught by CHSSA Hall of Famer George Lorbeer. For the next four years, Sandy would compete in debate, extemp and impromptu. Then, in 1957, having received his M.A. in speech from San Francisco State, Sandy would return to Lowell High to student teach under Jack Anderson.

In February, 1958, a speech and history position became available at Harry Ells High School in Richmond. He took the job, glad to be teaching and really glad not to be selling shoes anymore. Harry Ells High soon became part of the Coast League, which at that time included schools as far south as Santa Cruz and as far north as the Oregon border. One memorable Saturday in 1962, Sandy hosted a league events tournament with an entry in excess of 1000 students. From Sandy’s perspective, it was time to split the league. He was instrumental in helping create the Golden Gate Speech Association where he served as executive secretary and tournament Director until 1966. In 1963, Sandy’s role in GGSa became primarily administrative as he chose to stop actively coaching speech and debate. He was replaced as forensic coach by Hall of Famer David Dansky. In 1967, Sandy transferred to El Cerrito High to teach math analysis and calculus where he would continue until retirement in 1998.

1968 was a tragic year for Sandy: One which he almost didn’t survive because of Gaucher Disease (an ethnic disease of Ashkenazic Jews). He underwent surgery eight times during the summer. He later commented, “I honestly was scared to death that I would never work again.” Sandy eventually did return to work. He became a sports commissioner of the ACAL and then as Commissioner of two leagues when the ACAL divided. He became the “Voice of the North Coast Section” from 1973 to 1992 announcing NCS State Qualifying Track and Field competitions as well as many other athletic events throughout those years at UC Berkeley.

In 1981 the West Country Times (6/7/81) selected Sandy as their first choice in the Sportsman of the Year ranking. He was also chosen as the district Teacher of the Year for the second time. In 1988 he decided it was time to give up his responsibilities as Commissioner. With more time, Sandy returned to speech, serving as treasurer of the Golden Gate Speech Association until retirement. Physically, life dealt Sandy a tough hand. During his teaching career, he had a total of twenty-four surgeries, including the amputation of his left leg and an eighteen-hour spinal reconstruction surgery; what he used to jokingly call “his summer vacation.” But he chose not to give way to self pity. He faced adversity with humor and taught lessons not found in textbooks.

