

# news galleryweek

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## Coaches, athletic director honored at the first annual Huddle – High School Student-Athlete Conference



On Tuesday, 118 students from 16 Tulare County high schools attended the first annual Huddle – High School Student-Athlete Conference. The Huddle was held at the Tulare County Office of Education and put on by the CHARACTER COUNTS! (CC!) office's Pursuing Victory with Honor (PVWH) program.

During the conference's lunch, coaches Victoria "Tori" Johnson and Rich Lambie, as well as athletic director John Perez, were honored by the Pursuing Victory with Honor program for their participation and support of PVWH and CHARACTER COUNTS! over the years. The coaches' award is called the "John Forenti Sportsmanship Award" and is named after the CC! program's first coordinator, who held that title from 1994 until 2005.

## **Victoria "Tori" Johnson, Mt. Whitney High School volleyball coach**

Tori Johnson walked into her first CHARACTER COUNTS! training 15 years ago. From that year on, Coach Johnson has been all-in on developing the entire student-athlete. She bought into the T.E.A.M. (Teach, Enforcement, Advocate, Model) concept of including the Six Pillars of Character in her coaching program. She takes time to teach the values and does not hesitate to enforce them even when it may cost the team a point. Regardless of her team or season, Coach Johnson is steadfast in advocating, and most importantly modeling, the core ethical values of Pursuing Victory with Honor.

## **Rich Lambie, Granite Hills High School coach**

During his 45 years of coaching, Rich Lambie developed a Pursuing Victory with Honor (PVWH) Game Plan that the CHARACTER COUNTS! office still uses today as a model for coaches. His PVWH Game Plan includes developing the student-athlete by helping them to make a difference on their campus, in their community, and by having fun. Coach Lambie lives and models a personal code of ethics symbolized by the Six Pillars of Character – trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. He carries his mission of developing the student-athlete through all avenues. For his students, he inspires them to reach personal physical fitness through a safe student-learning environment where all levels of physical ability experience support and success.

## **John Perez, Visalia Unified School District / Mt. Whitney High School athletic director**

John Perez is a Mt. Whitney High School alumna. He played football and baseball and graduated in 1989. Perez then began his teaching career at Reedley High School in 1994. In the fall of 1995, he started at Mt. Whitney, where he also coached football and baseball, spending four years as the head varsity baseball coach. Perez became the athletic director at Mt. Whitney in the winter of 2008. He remained as the athletic director until August 2022, when he started his new position as Visalia Unified School District's director of athletics. Perez has served Mt. Whitney students for a total of 27 years.

## **Huddle empowers student-athletes**

PVWH's Sportsmanship Action Team, which is made up of high school student-athletes, came up with the Huddle and led breakout sessions - with assistance from professionals. They presented for their peers in the areas of communication, team building, nutrition, collegiate student-athlete preparation, and social media. Along with the breakout sessions, students met and interacted with other students all day through games and activities that encouraged positive sportsmanship, win or lose.



The goal of the Huddle is to empower youth to take back the information they learned and create a school athletic advisory team that will positively impact their team and their school culture.

A middle school version of the Huddle will be held on March 29 for students transitioning into high school athletics. For more information on either the Huddle or PVWH, contact Gene Mendes at [genem@tcoe.org](mailto:genem@tcoe.org). To join the Sportsmanship Action Team, visit [tcoe.org/PVWH/SAT](http://tcoe.org/PVWH/SAT).

Photos above:

~ From left to right: Superintendent of Schools Tim Hire, Gene Mendes, coach Rich Lambie, coach Tori Johnson, athletic director John Perez, Kelley Petty, and Kathleen Green-Martins pose for a photo after receiving awards from the CHARACTER COUNTS! and Pursuing Victory with Honor programs.

~ Sportsmanship Action Team member, Alex Elick, speaks during a breakout session on nutrition at the Huddle – High School Student-Athlete Conference.