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It's Onward for North Catholic's proud tradition

As a North Catholic alumnus, it's hard to believe it or even utter these very dismal words, but in a few short months Northeast Catholic High School will graduate its final senior class and close its doors forever. With the closing of those doors ends a long and historical soccer tradition in the Philadelphia area that spans over 80 years. I grew up in the Kensington area and attended "North" in the early '90s. While never playing soccer for North Catholic, I was always a fan of my school's winning traditions as well as the Kensington, Port Richmond, Fishtown, Bridesburg, Frankford and Juniata areas' intense, competitive love for the game of soccer. I had many friends and a few family members represent North Catholic soccer as players. Each North player, no matter what neighborhood they were from, shared the same competitive spirit instilled in them from their years of playing for North Catholic.

Now it's hard to understand how a guy such as myself, who never played one second for North Catholic, could ever know how the players feel or felt about being part of such a heralded legacy as North Catholic soccer has. But having the limitless pride of being a North Catholic alumnus, I came to the realization that I'm certain I can relate but not fully understand what these men feel and what they are a part of.

What opened my eyes to this certainty was attending North Catholic Soccer's Hall of Fame Induction ceremony March 28. To see former Falcon greats from the past 50 years or so, one by one, sharing brief stories of their experiences and what playing soccer for North Catholic meant to them was inspiring to say the least. Almost every inductee earned honors such as High School All-Catholic, All-State, All-American...Collegian All-Conference, All-Area, All-American.

To hear the way former coaches and players of archrival schools of North Catholic describe how most schools in the Catholic League modeled their soccer programs in the North Catholic Falcon mold was amazing.

Most of the members of North Catholic's Soccer Hall of Fame went on to greater successes after North, but as I listened to the gentlemen speak I realized that at that stage of their lives, North Catholic soccer was their lives. It was tradition, it was excellence, it was everything for a lot of great soccer players. All the great soccer teams over the years North Catholic has produced has yielded one of the most dominant and successful high school athletic programs Philadelphia will ever see.

To name a few record-setting accomplishments: most PCL titles (22) in city history; did not lose a single PCL contest in 116 straight games stretching from 1956 to 1967 and in that stretch won an incredible 11 PCL titles in a row; since the 1950s North Catholic has won a PCL title in every decade except the '80s.

Now, as all good things must do, North Catholic soccer as we know and love will officially end in June. It does sadden me to accept the reality of the end of a very special part of my life's association with Northeast Catholic the school, but after really getting a feel of what the word "tradition" means by attending North Catholic's Soccer Hall of Fame ceremonies, I feel an even deeper loss for all of those young men who dedicated a portion of their lives for the mere privilege of playing soccer for Northeast Catholic High School.

I will and I believe all my Falcon brothers will follow what was taught to us as young men attending North Catholic by moving "Onward." To live by the virtues that were the reasons North Catholic chose the falcon as its mascot. It is "a bird of prey that never lets go of what it has captured; it is completely faithful to its trainer; and it is the fastest of God's creatures."

With these virtues as our blueprint, I have hope that the financial situation North Catholic has succumbed to can be re-evaluated and we can restore and continue North Catholic's proud Salesian traditions. Onward, Onward! Behold where dawns the glory! Hail, alma mater, our North Catholic High!!!

Paul Mellon
Northeast Catholic Class of 1994