

CROSSING THE LINE: RECRUITING VIOLATIONS IN
HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS

A thesis submitted to the
Kent State University Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for University Honors

by

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May, 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There was a point this project almost didn't happen.

After months of investment but no progress in my reporting, I approached my thesis advisor, Jacqueline Marino, and brought up the possibility of dropping the idea altogether. Though the concepts were important to me, so was getting a good night's rest and avoiding unnecessary stress, and other classes and organization involvements seemed to already make the aforementioned difficult. For a few weeks, it appeared as though I would put off completion of the project until everybody involved forgot I ever mentioned it. However, Jacquie — as she prefers in class — shut that talk down quickly and pushed me to continue reporting. Though graduating with Honors is a perk, she reminded me that the point of the project was to shed light on a controversial and misunderstood topic in high school athletics. For this, and for the many meetings, edits, and helpful pointers, I thank her.

All four members of my defense committee — Marino, Mitchell McKenney, Candace Bowen, and Katherine Orr — helped me craft my writing through four years of college. At one point or another, they've all critiqued my work and guided my development as a writer, although Dr. Orr offered me more creative writing advice while all others made sure I had a good "lede." Learning from these four has truly been a pleasure, and I certainly hope this thesis project is an accurate reflection of their expertise.

THE PROJECT

Hed: Recruiting among high schools becoming a prominent problem

Sug: High school athletic officials scramble to find a solution to a hot-button issue

Byline: Jimmy Miller

AKRON — Joseph Vassalotti's quaint office in downtown Akron is not far from the city's trademark spots. He's located just a few minutes north of the University of Akron and a short drive east of Highland Square.

Vassalotti is the athletic director of Akron Public Schools, which contains seven public school systems. But his office — and his district — is adjacent to some of the most prominent private schools in Ohio high school athletics. In his two years on the job, parents and coaches of the schools he oversees have voiced numerous complaints of illegal recruiting between public and private schools.

These people, Vassalotti said, are concerned that nearby private schools are poaching students from public school systems with the sole intention of bolstering their athletic programs.

“The perception is that the recruiting going on is more blatant, and out in the open, and reckless and a bit arrogant than what anyone around here has seen before,” Vassalotti said.

Vassalotti added that most people think private schools are the culprits, luring students away from public schools, but Vassalotti said he believes anyone can illegally recruit. Within his own district, he’s heard coaches accuse other coaches of trying to steal students away from each other.

The Ohio High School Athletic Association — a non-profit organization which oversees all state-sanctioned athletics in Ohio — has found 21 illegal recruiting violations in the last three academic school years. These violations are a result of OHSAA Bylaw 4-9.

“I would hope that if it happens, be it private or public school, that it’s dealt with fairly and consistently and that a message is sent that it’s illegal,” Vassalotti said. “The OHSAA is all about education-based athletics. Winning shouldn’t be a top priority — everyone wants to win, but if that’s the number one priority and it causes coaches or whomever to recruit illegally, then the rules should be enforced.”

Vassalotti said this last April, a few months before Archbishop Hoban — a private school located just 10 minutes from his office — became the target of sanctions for football recruitment violations in the fall.

In 2016-17, OHSAA has uncovered 12 recruiting violations, already more than double the five from last year. Of the 21 total violations, four have resulted in at least partial postseason coaching bans. No school was removed from the playoffs during the three-year span, as the punishment is typically a fine and educational sessions.

This year's round of sanctions include the high-profile case at Hoban, although OHSAA retracted its initial sanction on the Knights and allowed Tim Tyrell to coach in this year's Division III state championship. He was initially banned through the entire playoffs.

Massillon Washington, Dublin Coffman, Cleveland Glenville and Mayfield schools are among those that have also since been penalized.

During a series of meetings and sanction negotiations over the last two years, the rules have been widely discussed and hotly debated. Illustrated by the rising number of violations and growing community concern, recruiting is also a problem that's here to stay.

Rising concern

Vassalotti isn't the only school administrator who's fielded comments about recruiting in the past: Last January, he joined an estimated 50 athletic directors and coaches from the area who attended an impromptu meeting at Stow High School.

Stow's Athletic Director Cyle Feldman and Kent Roosevelt's AD Mark Pfaff hosted a two-hour session to discuss what's legal — and what's not — in terms of athletic recruitment.

“We had several examples of illegal recruiting by many of the private schools, specifically Archbishop Hoban High School,” Feldman wrote in an email response. “We wanted to raise awareness at the OHSAA as these schools seemed to have a negative attitude about following the rules. Therefore, we decided to initiate a meeting amongst Northeast Ohio Athletic Directors to discuss the recruiting bylaws.”

OHSAA's Director of Communications Tim Stried pushed back on the idea that private schools are entirely to blame, as a majority of the 21 violations over the last three years came from public schools.

“That's one of the misconceptions out there, that it's a private school issue,” Stried said.

“It's definitely a public school issue, too.”

Pfaff didn't name any private schools directly, nor did he say he helped organize the meeting because of private schools, but he's not sure if anyone from private schools attended the meeting. He said he felt the meeting was simply informational.

"It was not an attack on the private schools. It was not an attack on any individual school, so to speak," Pfaff said last spring. "This is my 19th year [working in administrative athletics] and I... couldn't answer that question — what was allowed and what wasn't allowed."

Deborah Moore and Roxanne Price, associate commissioners on the OHSAA board, led the meeting with a Powerpoint presentation and spent another hour answering questions.

Vassalotti said the questions often invoked scenarios that, without naming schools, seemed to be less hypothetical than they were specific. One coach from his district brought up rumors that a private school coach dined with eighth-grade students, and another said a student-athlete from a private school texted a friend from a public school asking him to switch districts. An athletic director at the meeting even said he had records of coaches luring an eighth-grader to their schools using social media.

“One of the schools brought up the idea that students were being [recruited] from that public school district to attend a private school by the enticement of automobiles being made available to them at a reduced rate or more accessible in some way,” Vassalotti said. “The meeting was cordial, the meeting was respectful, but there was a lot of concern in the audience.”

Moore — who has since spearheaded a “recruiting summit” in February to talk about Bylaw 4-9 — said coaches from all types of sports attended last January’s meeting, but recruiting violations often occur in male-dominated athletics.

“It seems that there is more recruiting now, particularly in boys [athletics], and particularly in a couple of high-profile sports — football and basketball,” Moore said.

OHSAA did not identify how many complaints the office receives because, as Stried said, many cases don’t end up turning into sanctions.

“We get correspondence all the time about possible violations or rumors, which 99 percent of the time we pass along to school administrators to look into,” Stried said. “We don’t track all those. There are just too many, and most of the time there is no proof and it doesn’t lead to sanctions.”

How an investigation works

OHSAA deems a complaint as credible based on the evidence provided, though there's no set definition of "credible evidence." If there are pictures of an assistant coach standing alongside another school's sideline after the game, wearing his or her own school's memorabilia, OHSAA might investigate. A similar picture of a coach merely sitting in the stands appears less damning.

Moore said social media has only made defining credible evidence even more difficult. Anybody can tweet at a prospective student and write, "You would look great in a green-and-white jersey," but defining this practice as recruiting is approaching murky territory, she said.

"Some people are not very intelligent about the way they use social media. They put everything out there and once it's out there, it's out there forever," Moore said. "It's changed the game for sure."

Only one recruiting sanction in Ohio has directly stemmed from social media — a student at one school tried recruiting a student at another school using Twitter — but OHSAA is able to use these networks as a starting point.

“Everybody has their own Instagram account, their own Facebook page,” Pfaff said.

“That was one of the concerns that’s kind of evolved over the last couple of years that, quite frankly, no one really had to worry about before the social media craze.”

Stried said OHSAA does not count how many investigations the office conducts.

There are three stages to looking at a potential recruiting violation: First, OHSAA will ask a superintendent, principal or an athletic director to conduct his or her own investigation into claims someone has made against that school or district. If OHSAA decides it needs more information, its members will seek comment from outside sources with knowledge of the situation.

Moore said in particularly egregious cases, OHSAA will hire a private investigator.

However, she added that this process is time-consuming and often expensive. Kristin Ronai, an administrative assistant for eligibility, wrote in an email response that this cost usually amounts to “several thousand dollars.”

“We try to limit these to the most intensive and egregious cases,” Ronai wrote. “The cost will vary depending on how much time the investigator spends on one case, and how much each respective investigator charges per hour.”

Stried added OHSAA conducts investigations as though they could be taken to court: The evidence must be practically conclusive before an investigation even occurs.

“So much in recruiting is verbal: It’s he-said, she-said, but you can’t win on that in court,” Stried said. “If we don’t have hard evidence and [we’re] not assured we’ll win in court, we really can’t move forward with it.”

Suburban League Commissioner Keith Walker, who attended the January meeting at Stow, said he thinks OHSAA often receives incomplete evidence or unwarranted complaints about recruiting. He said somebody at the meeting likened the situation to a disconnect between OHSAA — “the people with the power” — and the people with the information.

“I think that sometimes the schools are frustrated thinking the OHSAA doesn’t do anything. The OHSAA tries very hard but they have limited manpower, limited budgets and what it takes to prove recruitment appears to be very difficult,” Walker said. “I think they [the OHSAA] sometimes feel their hands are tied.”

Stried said many people liken OHSAA to the NCAA, the institution in charge of collegiate athletic regulation. However, he said NCAA has 75 people working in its infractions department — OHSAA has three.

“We rarely go out and investigate something,” Stried said. “If we did, we’d never run any tournaments. We’d never get anything done.”

Switching sanctions

OHSAA did investigate Archbishop Hoban, and for at least a few weeks in the fall, fans who pack Dowd Field on Fridays wondered about what sanctions the football program faced.

OHSAA announced penalties amidst its investigation into coach Tim Tyrrell and his program, and on Sept. 20, said initial penalties against the school included a two-year probation and a five-day limit to how many days he can coach his team this summer.

Perhaps most notably, however, was a 2016 postseason ban on Tyrrell: If his team were to qualify for the playoffs, he could not coach the team.

“As a veteran coach and the current athletic administrator at Archbishop Hoban, we believe that Tim Tyrrell was aware his actions were in violation of the OHSAA’s recruiting bylaw,” interim OHSAA Commissioner David Gray said through a press release at that time.

But OHSAA watered down these penalties in November, lifting the postseason ban to just two games — which the Knights won by a combined 58-7 score — and instead implemented a \$5,000 fine and required development of a program to educate Hoban coaches against illegal recruiting practices.

In September, it looked like Tyrrell wouldn’t be able to coach the Knights in the Division III postseason. By December, he was on the sidelines as his team won the state championship in Columbus.

“The focus was on education of the bylaws and productive, corrective action,” Hoban president Todd Sweda told the Akron Beacon Journal in November. “We look forward to spearheading a program to further educate our coaches, admissions personnel and those of surrounding schools.”

Stried said the Hoban case evolved when Tyrrell entered an Akron-area middle school to talk to a male student who wanted to attend Hoban. Stried added Hoban officials

admitted the recruiting error immediately and the middle school invited Tyrrell onto its campus.

Stried added the reduction in violations came from “continued conversations between school administrators and our staff.”

“We often will come out with an initial list of sanctions that will include X, Y and Z,” Stried said. “Then in the aftermath, we will continue to have dialogue with our commissioner.”

This wasn’t the first time OHSAA reduced sanctions on punished schools.

OHSAA also reduced recruiting violations in 2013, as the Toledo Blade [reported](#) OHSAA Commissioner Dan Ross and Whitmer’s Superintendent Patrick Hickey converted win forfeitures, a \$100,000 fine and potential league membership suspension into just a \$60,000 fee.

In that case, seven players were reportedly in question. Among them, the Blade reported, were Nate and Nick Holley, twin brothers from Michigan who now play football at Kent State. Nick quarterbacked the Toledo team to a state championship game and was once named the Blade’s Player of the Year.

Citing FERPA, Moore said neither she nor any representative from OHSAA can talk too specifically about recruiting incidents or punishments. Because OHSAA is a 501(c)(3) organization, it's not possible to obtain copies of the organization's investigations.

When asked about specific sanctions, Stried emailed press releases on the Hoban case as well as 2016 sanctions on Massillon Washington, Cleveland Glenville and Dublin Coffman. In the Massillon case, one student-athlete was declared ineligible for the entire season while another had to sit out for half the year.

Archbishop Hoban's Tyrrell — who also serves as the school's athletic director — did not respond to interview requests. Sweda also did not respond to interview requests. Massillon's coach and athletic director Nate Moore, who was suspended through the 2016 postseason, declined to comment.

What's next?

Deborah Moore said 20 key stakeholders, including OHSAA's legal counsel, an attorney and a private investigator who's been previously involved in illegal recruiting sanctions, met in a non-public meeting in February to talk about recruiting sanctions statewide

Coaches from schools that have been sanctioned in the past were present, though Moore did not specify who.

OHSAA will host a similar meeting this spring.

“We basically talked a little bit about the landscape that we are looking at right now,” Moore said. “Nothing came out of it in terms of particular language that we are going to propose for referendum, but we had some good discussions.”

The bylaws specify a prospective athlete is a seventh-grader or older, but those who attended February’s meeting discussed whether OHSAA needed to lower that age. They also talked through some language in the bylaws to see if any of it is unclear or problematic.

OHSAA is also now considering a regulation Indiana passed in 2015 called the “past link” rule. According to the [Indianapolis Star](#), Indiana’s athletics board aimed to prevent students from transferring to a school where they previously received instruction from that coach in a non-school setting.

“[These regulations] make a presumption that there has been influence or athletic recruitment when we can establish that there was a past link between an adult, such as a coach or a trainer, and the student when the student makes a change,” Moore said.

OHSAA is not looking at any other state models at this time, but the board is considering adjusting its model to reflect that of the NCAA, which “very specifically” lists actions a coach may or may not take.

Moore doesn’t expect the bylaws to change in the immediate future, nor does she expect OHSAA will vote on any of the discussed changes in its May docket.

“I don’t think there’s any timetable, but I got a sense of urgency from most people,” Moore said. “Most of the people, they want to follow the rules and they want their opponent to do so as well. How to go about it — how to make things clear, more definitive, how to make consequences appropriate — is the issue.”

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

For roughly three years, I've spent time as a sports reporter for the Akron Beacon Journal. Though I've covered anything from Kent State basketball to tailgating outside of Cleveland Browns games, the majority of my work has been in high school athletics. Over the course of that time, I've interacted with plenty of coaches, fans, players, and administrators — sometimes for my story, sometimes just conversationally. Occasionally, somebody would bring up illegal recruiting among high schools, especially around football or basketball playoffs, when the stakes are higher and the frustration more heated. The importance of illegal recruiting practices cannot be understated: People take stock in high school athletics, especially when they know or are related to some of the kids on the team.

As part of my completion of this thesis project, I was tasked with critically analyzing my own work and defending its place among similar articles or research. In other words, I hope to use this section to explain the process of my own reporting and establish its significance in the field of high school athletics. I also hope to show how my work on this project is a culmination of all the lessons I've learned in my four years as an undergraduate at Kent State University.

Around the time I started researching this project, the Ohio High School Athletic Association increased dialogue with local schools and lawyers about their own bylaws. The landscape for high school athletics didn't necessarily become contentious regarding

illegal recruiting, but conversations were becoming more frequent. When I first contacted Cyle Feldman, the athletic director at Stow-Munroe Falls High School, he praised the topic I wished to explore as “fitting” for this time period. Just a week before I first met with the thesis coordinator to express interest in this work, multiple high school athletic directors and coaches met at Stow to discuss illegal recruiting. Feldman collaborated with Kent Roosevelt’s athletic director Mark Pfaff to host Roxanne Price and Deborah Moore, both representatives from OHSAA. In my first semester of reporting, I talked to various sources who attended that meeting, including Feldman, Pfaff, and Moore. What I gained from those preliminary conversations was a sense of how severe illegal recruiting could be in Ohio. While some of the scenarios they allegedly discussed were mild, others were remarkably extreme, such as a school offering discounted automobiles to prospective students. Based on my research, OHSAA never confirmed this scenario actually happened, but the meeting did seem to spark awareness of potential violations: OHSAA more than doubled its illegal recruiting sanctions on schools from the year prior (up to 12 from the five reported in 2015-16). I based much of my first semester’s work on that meeting, and when I wasn’t interviewing officials who attended, I was transcribing notes from those conversations. Following my initial research and the early interview process, I transcribed my interviews so I could easily recall information or quotes my sources provided as I wrote a draft. As a part-time professional journalist, I’ve learned the talent of working on a deadline, but it’s far easier to remember a quote from a source who said it five minutes prior. If I’m trying to recollect all of what a source said a year ago, I need

the transcriptions to jog my memory and provide insights into a topic I may have otherwise forgotten. I additionally spent the first semester diving into any research I could find on the subject, but there wasn't much to work from. So much of illegal recruiting dialogue is misinformed, whereas no local news outlets have clearly illustrated how an investigation takes place. There's little to no substantive research involved in recruiting among high school athletics although there's plenty to sift through when dealing with colleges recruiting high school athletes. My meetings with Michael Hawkins, a subject librarian that specializes in research with the Journalism and Mass Communication program, reinforced the notion that much of my research would come from field reporting. Many media outlets only report on recruiting violations once there's a sanction, and even that reporting is typically scant because they've written a hard news story focusing simply on the punishments. Despite help from Marino and Hawkins, I found no research databases that proved particularly helpful. The lack of substantive background information on my subject material proved to be a blessing and a curse: While it made the researching phase of this project particularly frustrating, I felt as a journalist, I had a real opportunity to provide a story that hasn't been told. For the sake of pitching this story to professional publications upon its completion — which I intend to do — I give editors a concrete reason to accept my submission. My story offers a fresh take on illegal recruiting practices in high school athletics at a time when the dialogue is intensifying. OHSAA had another meeting with school officials in February about illegal recruiting practices and will meet again this spring.

Early on, I only wanted to capture a sense of what local administrators thought about illegal recruiting practices, but what I received in my second semester of interviewing was a crash course on how OHSAA conducts its investigations. Essentially, the organization corresponds with the accused school first to see if administrators there will self-investigate. If OHSAA is not satisfied with that response, board members will reach out to other sources who may have knowledge of the situation. In severe cases, OHSAA will even hire a private investigator, though for how much remains uncertain. Additionally, OHSAA will not launch an investigation unless evidence provided is overwhelming. My subsequent interviews with representatives from OHSAA helped me solidify my understanding of the investigation process, and in my article, I included a condensed, simple explanation for how it's done. Many of the potential readership — just exposed to the short breaking news stories about illegal recruiting — will see this process for the first time. In my second semester of reporting, I also wanted to touch on the notion that private schools recruit more often than public schools. I found a relatively split jury on this one: Though all of my sources said public schools are certainly guilty of illegal recruitment, some claimed private schools are a primary suspect while others said public schools might carry more of the blame. Even more stayed out of the debate altogether, although all of my sources agreed that the perception is certainly prominent. The issue with the overarching claim that private schools recruit athletes is that those schools do recruit their students; however, how they recruit is vital. Archbishop Hoban, for instance, may and has put up a billboard promoting the totality of what the school

provides, including academics and athletics. Private schools must recruit in order to maintain enrollment numbers. Still, there are limitations on what an administrator, coach, or even player on teams at those schools may do to draw in prospective students. This issue of private-versus-public is rarely tackled in the media, and on a personal note, gaining that understanding of how legal recruitment works was absolutely important as I continued my reporting. As a journalist, it's not my job to form an opinion but rather to inform my readership and let them decide how they feel about particular information. I feel this part of the process was most difficult in omitting my own personal bias.

Much of the writing process of the draft occurred in my final semester on the thesis project. Professor Marino suggested revisions to my work and helped me identify OHSAA's 990 forms using a website called Guidestar. Although I used little to no information from those forms in my final thesis project, I learned about OHSAA as an organization and was able to ask more insightful questions based on its structure. I conducted follow-up interviews with members of OHSAA as late as April to confirm some of the phrases in my story that Professor Marino questioned, and I sifted through the organization's meeting minutes to try to identify how many recruiting violations OHSAA confirmed over a three-year span. This number was one I later confirmed with an official at OHSAA to ensure my reporting was accurate. This final semester proved exciting in that the draft of the story finally came together, but also a bit dull considering how many documents I sorted through.

Even as I complete the analysis portion of this thesis, there are a few more steps I must take in order to achieve my end goal of additional publication. It's certain that the thesis project will be published through Kent State University Honors College, but I want to find an additional publishing partner for my journalistic article. I've identified local publications as potential landing spots for this project and will pitch this project soon. I'm certain the editor of this publication will suggest edits and have different style tastes, so I hope to accommodate accordingly. I found it difficult to find a visual element to this story, as many of my interviews requested to avoid even being recorded, let alone videotaped or photographed. Even with that considered, many interviews were held in offices or, in the preliminary stages, over the phone. I intend to communicate with my editor about a visual: perhaps there's an illustration to conceptualize or prior photography we can pull for specific portions of the project. If I had to start over again with my thesis project, I would consider these elements sooner in the process, although my endeavor to publish in another medium should allow me to identify the visual I want anyway.

Beyond contributing field research and reporting that can't be found elsewhere, I wanted to do this project as what is essentially a capstone to my work so far in college. I believe my work demonstrates my growth as a reporter after eight semesters at Kent State University. The depth of reporting — all the interviews, follow-up interviews, transcriptions, research, etc. — went deeper than I had previously gone before. Additionally, I proved I can identify what an audience wants by turning what I heard while reporting for other stories into a long-term project. Most of all, I showed my ability

to take a complicated matter and illustrate it clearly for my potential readership. It took me several months to become an expert on recruiting in high school athletics, and as much as I wanted to toss each and every piece of information I picked up through my reporting, I had to show some level of restraint and include just the vital elements. I told a long-form story in a relatively simple manner while still providing multiple voices on the discussion.

News Release – Ohio High School Athletic Association

Commissioner Daniel B. Ross, Ph.D.

Interim Commissioner Dave Gray

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■

For Immediate Release – Sept. 20, 2016

Contact: Tim Stried, OHSAA Director of Communications, tstried@ohsaa.org

■

OHSAA Announces Initial Findings and Penalties Against Akron Archbishop Hoban Football Program

Violation of OHSAA Recruiting Bylaw Results in Sanctions

■

COLUMBUS, Ohio – While the investigation into the football program at Akron Archbishop Hoban High School on a number of allegations is still ongoing, the Ohio High School Athletic Association has announced the initial findings and penalties against the school.

■

The penalties stem from a violation of OHSAA Bylaw 4-9-2 Recruiting, when head football coach Tim Tyrrell initiated contact in the fall of 2015 with a student at St. Hilary Elementary School.

■

“As a veteran coach and the current athletic administrator at Archbishop Hoban, we believe that Tim Tyrrell was aware his actions were in violation of the OHSAA’s recruiting bylaw,” said Dave Gray, OHSAA Interim Commissioner. “Rather than wait until the investigation concluded, which could be toward the end of the season, we felt compelled to announce these penalties now so the team and school have time to make the appropriate accommodations. We appreciate the cooperation of Hoban administrators and hope to conclude this investigation soon.”

■

The initial penalties include a postseason coaching suspension for Tyrrell if Hoban qualifies for the 2016 playoffs. In addition, Hoban is placed on probation for the remainder of the 2016-17 school year and all of the 2017-18 school year, and Tyrrell will be limited to a total of five days of contact with the Hoban football team during the summer of 2017.

■

The OHSAA will announce the end of the investigation and any additional findings and penalties at a later date.

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###OHSAA###

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News Release Ohio High School Athletic Association

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For Immediate Release Oct. 25, 2016

Contact: Tim Stried, OHSAA Director of Communications, tstried@ohsaa.org

OHSAA Announces Penalties Against Pair of Member Schools

In unrelated violations, Cleveland Glenville and Dublin Coffman placed on probation and receive other penalties

COLUMBUS, Ohio — In a pair of unrelated cases, the Ohio High School Athletic Association has issued penalties against Cleveland Glenville and Dublin Coffman for violations of OHSAA bylaws. Both schools appealed the initial penalties to the OHSAA Board of Directors on Oct. 20, which resulted in the Board modifying the rulings. However, probation and other penalties are still applied to both schools, as well as a coach suspension for Coffman.

Glenville violated OHSAA bylaw 3-1-2 when it did not respond to requests for information regarding a transfer student-athlete. After it was found that the transfer paperwork was falsified and the student-athlete should not have been permitted to participate in football contests this season, which he did after sitting out five games. Initially, the penalties included forfeiture of two varsity victories in which the ineligible student participated, but those forfeitures were rescinded by the Board upon appeal. Additional penalties are described below.

Coffman violated OHSAA bylaw 4-9, Recruiting, when the head football coach met with an eighth grade student-athlete and his father regarding the student enrolling at Coffman as a freshman. Penalties are described below.

“With Glenville, there were several issues with the falsified transfer paperwork that should have been addressed by school administrators before it was ever submitted to our office,” said Dave Gray, OHSAA Interim Commissioner. “And with Coffman, there is a protocol in place that our coaches are to follow when they are contacted by a student, or a family member, when the student is not enrolled at the coach’s school. Not adhering to those guidelines is a clear violation of the recruiting bylaw, and our staff issued its ruling based on information submitted by Coffman administrators.”

Glenville

In late August, Glenville submitted paperwork for a transfer student-athlete, which the OHSAA initially approved. However, in early September, after receiving additional information about the transfer, the OHSAA began attempting to contact Glenville administrators to follow up on several questions. The school failed to respond to repeated attempts and, after holding the student out of competition for the first half of the season, allowed the student to then participate in two varsity contests, which Glenville won. After appeal, the OHSAA Board of Directors ruled that the school will not be forced to forfeit those two victories, however the student-athlete is ineligible for the remainder of the 2016-17 school year, Glenville is fined \$2,000 and placed on probation through June 2018.

Coffman

Last spring, Coffman officials conducted an internal investigation, and in June self-reported that head football coach Mark Crabtree held meetings with an eighth grade student and the student’s father regarding the football program at Coffman. After self-reporting the violations, Coffman was willing to suspend the student-athlete if he attended Coffman, which he did not. The Commissioner’s Office issued more stringent penalties, which the OHSAA Board of Directors modified following the appeal and ruled that Crabtree is suspended for the team’s first two playoff games of 2016, if the team qualifies and advances. In addition, Coffman is placed on probation through June 2018, Crabtree shall have only seven days of contact with the team during the 2017 summer period, and

News Release Ohio High School Athletic Association

Commissioner Daniel B. Ross, Ph.D.

Interim Commissioner Dave Gray

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For Immediate Release Aug. 13, 2016

Contact: Tim Stried, Director of Information Services, tstried@ohsaa.org

■

OHSAA Sanctions Massillon Washington for Football Recruiting Violations

Coaching staff and others improperly influenced students to transfer; one student declared ineligible for 2016-17

■

COLUMBUS, Ohio—The Ohio High School Athletic Association has concluded its investigation into Massillon Washington High School's football program and determined several sanctions will be assessed for recruiting violations, OHSAA Interim Commissioner Dave Gray has announced.

■

The investigation involved several student-athletes who were recruited to attend Massillon Washington by its head football coach, Nate Moore, along with other Massillon Washington assistant football coaches and boosters. In addition to public reprimand, the penalties include a \$5,000 fine, probation for three years and the suspension of Coach Moore from coaching the team during the 2016 postseason playoffs if the team qualifies.

■

The OHSAA does not release names of student-athletes, but one of the student-athletes has been declared ineligible for the entire 2016-17 school year due to recruiting, while another student-athlete is ineligible for the first half of the 2016 football season due to not meeting an exception to the transfer bylaw.

■

"The OHSAA and our member schools take the recruiting bylaws very seriously," Dave Gray, OHSAA Interim Commissioner, said. "This is an opportunity for Massillon Washington to learn from its mistakes and take a leadership role as one of Ohio's most historically successful football programs. If further violations occur while the school is on probation, the school's membership in the OHSAA is in jeopardy."

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Among various violations of the OHSAA's recruiting bylaws were many instances of violations of Bylaw 9-4, No. 3, which reads: "If a coach leaves a school to pursue a coaching opportunity at another school, the coach shall refrain from any communication with any students at this or their former school." Coach Moore and others with Washington High School regularly communicated with and visited a student-athlete who was attending Coach Moore's previous school and provided extra benefits such as travel to summer camps.

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The violations began in the fall of 2015 when Moore took over as the head coach at Massillon Washington. Representatives of the school and football program met with the OHSAA in May to respond to the allegations of recruiting.

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###OHSAA###

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