

Memo to: Orting Lacrosse Board, coaches Mike Tarbell and Chris Gerke, Board President Dani Gerke
From: WHSBLA Board
Date: June 20, 2017

Late in the season, the WHSBLA Board received reports of problems with the Orting High Lacrosse Team from several sources: opposing coaches, WALOA game officials, and concerned parents. Members of the Board looked into these concerns and determined there were legitimate questions about the Orting program in 3 areas: excessive personal fouls by Orting players; using 8th grade players in 3 games; and using an out of state player in 2 games. The Board considered the Proposed Corrective Action Plan for the Orting Varsity Lacrosse Program, the statements made by Neva Gerke, Chris Gerke, and Mike Tarbell at our June 12 Board meeting, and the follow-up email of June 14 sent by Neva Gerke. After thorough discussion, the Board makes these findings:

Excessive personal fouls by Orting players: The Board finds that both coaches failed to properly supervise and control Orting players during games this season. As one Board member termed it, there was a lack of institutional control. This resulted in an excessive number of personal fouls, slashes, illegal body checks, and unnecessary roughness calls. The Orting scorebook also shows an excessive number of violent personal fouls and un-releasable penalties, and several players “fouled out” of games, a rare outcome in lacrosse games. We have also received several reports from parents and officials that the Orting sideline, including one or both coaches, often would cheer players flagged for multiple minute penalties arising from excessively violent hits. Finally, WALOA informed us on May 7th that coach Chris Gerke left the Montesano game in the 2nd quarter after receiving his 2nd unsportsmanlike conduct foul (occurring sequentially and immediately after his son fouled out in the 2nd quarter). WALOA also advised us that 4 Orting players were receiving an excessive number of personal fouls for violent play.

Use of 8th grade players in 3 games: As Neva Gerke points out, the Board already addressed this violation by suspending Coach Tarbell for one game and barring Orting from play-off contention for this season. The Board revisited this violation and sought additional explanation for how the use of 8th graders could have happened. We start by noting this violation was not self-reported. Rather, Board member Brandon Fortier noted this issue on April 26th while reviewing stats on sportability. But for this fortuitous fact, these violations may never have come to light. When confronted, Orting readily admitted to the violation, claiming confusion arising from Eastlake’s earlier failed appeal to add an 8th grader to their varsity roster. Given Orting’s use of an out of state player (discussed below), the Board revisits this explanation and finds it not credible. First, Coach Tarbell admitted receiving this Board’s response to Eastlake’s appeal. That response included the specific WIAA provision governing use of 8th graders:

WIAA rule 18.20.0: (8th) GRADERS PARTICIPATION WITH THE HIGH SCHOOL TEAM

18.20.1 High schools with an enrollment equal to or less than one-half of the enrollment in the largest 2B school may allow eighth (8th) graders from a WIAA member feeder middle school/junior high to participate in any high school program for that classification cycle.

Second, when asked, Neva Gerke admitted that she never confirmed whether Orting was listed as a 2B school for athletics and never inquired on the student enrollment at Orting. While these violations

have already been dealt with, the Board includes it as part of its overall analysis of problems within the Orting program.

Use of out of state player in 2 games: The Board finds Orting cheated its own players and opposing teams by using an obviously ineligible player from North Carolina in two games. Further, the Board finds that steps were taken by Orting to hide this violation by intentionally altering the official scorebook, by having this player wear the jersey of another Orting player, and by not adding this player to their sportability roster. There can be no justification for this level of blatant cheating, and Orting offers none.

From these findings, the Board next considers possible sanctions to the Orting 8th grade players, the high school team, and the high school coaches.

Orting 8th grade players: By a vote of 8-1¹, the Board will take no action against the involved 8th graders, and they will not lose a year of athletic eligibility. At least one parent specifically inquired if playing in these games was legal and was assured by one or more coaches that it was. These players reasonably relied on the Orting leadership and their coaches.

Orting high school team: By a vote of 9-0, the Board finds the conduct of Orting players and coaches this season sufficiently egregious to warrant barring Orting from the playoffs for 2018. While the effect of this punishes incoming and new players to the program, the excessive level of violence cannot be tolerated and a strong measure is called for. It is the hope of the Board that the sole focus of the 2018 season can be placed on honoring the game and learning to play the game the correct way.

Orting high school coaches: By a vote of 8-1², the Board suspends both head coach Mike Tarbell and assistant coach Chris Gerke for the 2018 season. Both are prohibited from coaching any WHSBLA team (whether varsity, JV, or freshmen team) for one year, commencing immediately. This ban includes coaching contact with incoming freshmen. Both coaches failed to honor and comply with our Code of Conduct, copied below. The Code says it all.

WHSBLA CODE OF CONDUCT

Lacrosse is the oldest American game. Native Americans have played it since long before the colonies were settled, and at the high school level it has been played since the late 1800's. This increases the importance of a sense of community among those who play, coach, work and follow the game of lacrosse. To establish and maintain a sense of community, we cannot ignore the way the game itself is played and the responsibilities we as coaches and administrators have to the game.

Responsibilities to the Game

Coaches are role models. As such, they shall always conduct themselves so as to maintain the highest principles, integrity and dignity of the game of lacrosse.

¹ Board member Rod Amell missed the June 12th meeting, but participated in the voting.

² It should not be construed that the 1 no vote favored the coaches. Rather, that Board member favored more severe sanctions.

Coaches are responsible for knowing, understanding and following all the rules of the game as established and directed by the National Federation of State High School Associations and the WHSBLA.

Coaches must adhere to both the letter and the spirit of all the rules.

Coaches are responsible for insuring that all players understand the rules and their spirit. All participants in the game of lacrosse must adhere to the letter and spirit of all the rules.

Coaches recognize that officials are major participants in the game. The Coach shall neither exhibit nor tolerate any behavior from others (staff and squad) – verbal or otherwise – that might reflect poorly on an official. This includes, but is not limited to arguing a judgment call in such a manner as to incite players and spectators against an official. There are approved methods by which a Coach may comment on an official's performance through WHSBLA. Public displays of displeasure – before, during, or after a contest – are not among these approved methods.

Win with character, lose with dignity.