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Addressing Unacceptable Behavior At Half Moon Bay High School Sporting Events

Issue

Has Half Moon Bay High School adequately addressed the on-going issue of unacceptable behavior at home sporting events?

Background

In November 2007, several local newspapers, including the *Daily Journal*, the *Daily News* and the *Oakland Tribune*, reported on the unacceptable behavior of Half Moon Bay High School's (HMBHS) students, fans and football players toward the spectators, students, and athletes of Sequoia High School (Sequoia) during a football game on November 2, 2007. Sequoia was the visiting team. This behavior included racial and homophobic slurs toward Sequoia football players, and harassment of Sequoia cheerleaders and fans.

The Daily Journal reported on November 8, 2007, "...a dramatic and unfortunate turn of events at Friday night's Sequoia-Half Moon Bay football game led to serious complaints by Sequoia officials. They say racial and homophobic slurs, as well as rocks, eggs and pine cones were hurled at Sequoia players, cheerleaders and fans. Sequoia officials said the cheerleaders and fans needed a police escort out of the stadium while rocks were thrown at the buses transporting the Sequoia football team back to Redwood City."

It was also reported in *The Daily Journal*, on November 14, 2007, that "...accusations of Half Moon Bay Cougars players using racial and homophobic slurs at Sequoia High School players; four naked youth storming the field, and eggs thrown at [Sequoia] Cherokee cheerleaders and fans during the Nov. 2 football game sparked outrage on both sides of the field."

On November 9, 2007, Cabrillo Unified School District officials, the HMBHS principal, and student leaders issued formal letters of apology to Sequoia. In a note to the Sequoia principal, the HMBHS principal stated that an educational program for students and parents would be implemented to help thwart similar behavior in the future.

Investigation

The San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) interviewed key administrators of HMBHS and Sequoia, a senior official of the Peninsula Athletic League, staff of the longstanding diversity committee at HMBHS, a board member and senior administrator of the Cabrillo Unified School District (CUSD). The Grand Jury interviewed a member of the Sequoia Union High School District Board and a senior administrator of the Sequoia Union High School District.

The Grand Jury reviewed CUSD policies relating to student behavior at school sports functions on campus. The Grand Jury also reviewed the Central Coast Section (CCS) Sportsmanship Policy and the proposed changes to the Sportsmanship Contract as recommended by the Sportsmanship Committee, League Commissioners and the League's Executive Committee.

The Grand Jury reviewed the updated May 2008, HMBHS Cougar Code of Conduct that must be signed by Cougar athletes and their parent/guardian to verify that they have read and understood the HMBHS Player's "Code of Conduct."

Findings

The Grand Jury found through its investigation that:

- Unacceptable behavior has been a problem at HMBHS sports events for many years.
- HMBHS Principal and student body officers issued written apologies to Sequoia.
- No concrete evidence of policy or procedures was discovered regarding specific disciplinary actions to be taken against guilty parties or school sports teams.
- CUSD interviewees stated the belief that its unique small coastal town isolation could be a contributing factor to the HMBHS attitudes and behavior.
- HMBHS has engaged the Positive Coaching Alliance to facilitate the promotion of good sportsmanship by the HMBHS administration. By Fall 2008, the Positive Coaching Alliance will have met with coaches, staff, student athletes, and their parents.
- HMBHS's Diversity Policy will be printed on the school-year calendar, which will be distributed to all students and reviewed in class.

The Grand Jury also found that HMBHS plans to:

- Provide sensitivity training to all students.
- Have more visible staff on site to deter and handle any mischief at HMB High School sporting events.

- Accept the proposed changes to the Sportsmanship Contract. The Sportsmanship Contract is “the minimum requirement, and the schools can always provide more information to remind students, athletes, coaches, and parents of the importance of sportsmanship¹.”
- Make physical changes to the football field to limit contact between visiting teams and their fans and HMBHS fans. The proposed changes include:
 1. Relocating the snack bar to a neutral area that will limit HMB High School teams and fans from coming in contact with visiting teams and their fans.
 2. Putting up a fence in back of the bleachers of the visiting team area.

Conclusion

The Grand Jury concludes that:

1. Although steps have been taken to encourage cordiality with spectator sports fans from both HMBHS and visiting teams, implementation of some of these proposed changes have not yet occurred.
2. There is little evidence of a response plan and/or a disciplinary policy by HMBHS if unacceptable behavior arises at future sporting events.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that the Cabrillo Unified School District Board of Trustees direct the Superintendent to:

1. Formulate, for the Board’s adoption, a disciplinary policy that includes zero-tolerance of unacceptable behavior for student athletes and the student body. This could include forfeiting all games for that year in the sport in which the unacceptable behavior occurred.
2. Implement the adopted disciplinary policy.
3. Formulate and implement a response plan to deal with unacceptable behavior at sporting events.
4. Direct the Half Moon Bay High School Principal to:
 - a. Take appropriate steps to implement the physical plans listed above in the Grand Jury's findings in this report.
 - b. Provide all students with the policies listed in Recommendations 1 and 2 above.
 - c. Have all students sign a form that verifies that they have read the disciplinary policy.

¹ Sportsmanship Contract CIF/Central Coast Section April 24, 2008



SPORTSMANSHIP CONTRACT

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April 24, 2008

The attached proposed changes to the Sportsmanship Contract have been recommended from the Sportsmanship Committee, League Commissioners and the Executive Committee.

The concept of having the principal and athletic director sign off on the Sportsmanship Contracts verifying they will adhere to the current CCS and School's Sportsmanship Policies will still be in place.

The concern of having schools turn in the Sportsmanship Contract every season seemed to create quite a paper crunch for all people concerned. The following changes seem to accomplish the same purpose and eliminate 2 deadlines.

The recommended changes/additions are:

1. The Principal or designate will present to the entire student body, the school's and the CCS's Sportsmanship Policy based on the Principles of Pursuing Victory with Honor.
2. The Principal or designate will present to the entire faculty, the school's and the CCS's Sportsmanship Policy based on the Principles of Pursuing Victory with Honor.
3. The Principal or designate will present to their parents verbally and in writing, the school's and the CCS's Sportsmanship Policy based on the Principles of Pursuing Victory with Honor.
4. The Principal will need to complete the Sportsmanship Contract with examples/outlines of the presentations to the student body, faculty and parents.
5. The Sportsmanship Contract needs to be completed and submitted to the CCS Office prior to the first league contest of the Fall Season.
6. The Sportsmanship Contract needs to be submitted only once for the entire year.

The Sportsmanship Contract is the minimum requirement and the schools can always provide more information to remind students, athletes, coaches and parents of the importance of sportsmanship.