

Don't blame Linn-Mar for transfers

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 21 December 2014 18:04 -



First the Jenks sisters transferred into the Linn-Mar school district, although they were young at the time and not in high school. Then the Sommer twins transferred to Linn-Mar when their mother got a new job. Then Kelsey Drake switched from Jefferson to Linn-Mar for swimming. Now Amanda Ollinger has followed suit and is leaving Jefferson behind for the Lions.

These are six high-profile transfers involving some of the very best female athletes in the state. The Jenks sisters flew under the radar when they open-enrolled in the Linn-Mar district, because Stephanie was in the sixth grade at the time and Jennifer was in the fifth grade, but all the others happened after they began their high school careers.

People like to rush to judgment about these things and suspect there was foul play, but there is no shred of evidence to suggest that anyone who works for the Linn-Mar school district did anything wrong. There was no recruiting, no tampering, nothing improper by Linn-Mar.

Did parents talk to other parents before these things happened? Perhaps, but there's nothing illegal about that. If you were thinking about changing schools, wouldn't you have questions that needed to be answered?

The Linn-Mar school district must enroll student-athletes who live in their district, according to state law. They cannot say, "Sorry Amanda, too many people will be upset if you switch here from Jefferson, so we're not going to let you in the door." The next step would be someone losing their job.

If you move into a new school district, you become immediately eligible at your new school, assuming you are a student in good standing. It's different for students who are allowed to

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open-enroll somewhere, because they have to wait at least 90 school days at their new school before becoming eligible if they do not move into the district.

The Jenks sisters open-enrolled at Linn-Mar, but it was prior to their high school years and they did not have to wait before becoming eligible once they reached the ninth grade.

Ollinger's family will be moving into the Linn-Mar district in the next few days, in time for classes when they resume in early January. She'll be immediately eligible to play for the Linn-Mar basketball team once the move is complete and classes have begun.

You can question the timing of Ollinger's move if you want, and some people have. It certainly would have been better for the Jefferson girls basketball team if the Ollingers had waited until after the season to make their move, but it's a free country and people are entitled to do what's in the best interest of their family.

Ollinger, a star basketball and volleyball player, hopes people will understand and come to accept her decision. She has posted a moving explanation of the move on Twitter, which is worth your time to read. Here it is, in her words:

"Would you do everything for your parents who have sacrificed everything for you?," she began.

"For the past two years my parents have driven me all over the country for me to get the best opportunity for college. They took almost four months off of work this year for me to live my dream.

"The day I committed to Iowa, it was the best day of my life. The first people I told were my parents, who have been tagging along on this journey with me. So when they told me they could have work for the next five-plus years in Marion I was totally on board with it.

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"As the basketball season started my parents kept having to push off work so they could make it to my games. They asked me if I would be willing to move less than two minutes from their work to make our lives less stressful.

"In less than a week I will live 35 minutes away from Jefferson High School. I discussed it with my parents and they did not feel comfortable with me driving such a far distance two times a day, some days even more.

"So I had to choose between my team, school and parents. Of course, I chose my parents. Wouldn't you?

"This is so much more than just a basketball change, this is a life change. I am deeply sorry if I offended anyone while making this life-changing decision. I was not trying to intentionally hurt my team or my school. I love them to death.

"I hope you can forgive me in the future, or at least try to understand where I was coming from. I just felt it was the right thing to do for everything my parents and I have gone through. They have sacrificed so much for me. Now it's my turn," she concluded.

The Jenks family lives in Aurora in the East Buchanan school district, but Stephanie and Jennifer were attending school in the Starmont district because it was closer to their home and Starmont was a bigger school. The parents sought more academic opportunities for their daughters and initially open-enrolled in the Linn-Mar district, driving from Aurora to Linn-Mar each day.

The daily commute became too much once the Jenks sisters became involved with school activities, so the family rented an apartment in the Linn-Mar district to save time for everyone. They still own their home in Aurora and spend weekends there, but they have their apartment in the Linn-Mar district as well.

Stephanie Jenks is an outstanding runner with numerous state titles and Drake Relays crowns. She is also an accomplished swimmer and a state qualifier. Jennifer Jenks was a two-time

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silver medalist at the state swim meet this year. Each Buchanan High School and Starmont High School do not have their own swimming teams.

Kelsey Drake won two state titles in swimming this year. She said she transferred from Jefferson to Linn-Mar to enhance her swimming career.

The Sommer twins, Katie and Kristie, are star softball players and basketball players. They are now freshmen at Wartburg.

If these people were your daughters, what would you have done? The answer probably varies by family, but one thing is certain.

Don't blame Linn-Mar.