

## Linn-Mar families filing complaints with BOEE

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 18 February 2016 17:07 - Last Updated Friday, 19 February 2016 22:21

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A group of Linn-Mar families has decided to take their complaints about the school's football and weight-training program to the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners after having their grievances dismissed by the school district following an in-house investigation.

The families have charged Linn-Mar assistant football coach Matt Casebolt with a series of verbal, mental, emotional and physical abuses and they have charged head coach Bob Forsyth as the person in charge of the football program where the alleged incidents took place.

"The main culprit in our minds is Mr. Casebolt," said Mark Henrichs, the spokesman for the Linn-Mar families. "In my opinion, all of the football (varsity) coaches have to go. They've all seen it. They may not have participated in it, but they've all seen it, they've all covered it up, they've all been quiet."

In addition, the families hold Linn-Mar athletic director Scott Mahmens responsible for being the supervisor of the department.

The families took their complaints to the school district in early December. Four of those families received letters Wednesday from Linn-Mar principal Jeff Gustason, saying their allegations have been investigated and dismissed due to "insufficient evidence."

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The investigation was conducted by Mahmens and other Linn-Mar officials.

Henrichs said there are approximately 20 Linn-Mar families that have complaints, including five families that have shared their complaints with the Metro Sports Report.

Most of the alleged incidents occurred last summer and fall, but the parents maintain there is a long history of abuse. The first allegation was filed in 2011 when Michelle and Rex Jones say Casebolt called their son, Caymen, a "show queer" for attending show choir practice instead of weight-training sessions after the football season was over.

Bob Jordan claims his son, Jeremy, suffered a bloody mouth and chipped tooth last summer when Casebolt slapped a circular weight into his son's face because Casebolt did not think he was doing the drill properly. Jordan said his son was not offered medical assistance after the mishap and came home with a swollen and bloody mouth.



Jon and Teri Rstom say their son, Mason, suffered a concussion at the Linn-Mar football camp this past Aug. 3 and that it took the Linn-Mar trainer about three hours to tell them their son may have sustained a head injury rather than possibly being dehydrated, as originally conveyed. The Rstoms say their son suffered a memory loss from the incident and still does not remember what happened.

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"I'm kind of disgusted with the whole thing," said Jon Rstom, whose son left the football program.

Another family, which does not want to be identified at this time due to fears of possible repercussions, says their son accidentally broke a mirror during a weight-training session and when he informed Casebolt the coach harassed their son and told him to clean up the broken glass, without offering assistance or proper equipment. The family says their son cut his hand trying to pick up the broken glass and was not given medical assistance when it happened.

Henrichs, the spokesman for the group, said his son Ethan was harassed by Casebolt and Forsyth for attending college football camps last summer and going on vacation instead of spending more time in the Linn-Mar weight room.

Families claim there have been repeated incidents of bullying, taunting and harassment, especially by Casebolt.

Several of the families waited until after the football season to file complaints, claiming their sons did not want their families to get involved when the incidents occurred.

"Kids are so scared of these guys that the kids beg their parents not to do anything," Henrichs said.

Bob Jordan had a similar answer for why he waited several months to file a complaint.

"Jeremy had asked me not to," he said. "He said, 'Don't, Dad, it's just going to cause more problems. It will make me even more of a target for Casebolt, so just don't."

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"Jeremy said, 'You don't get it. Casebolt will make it miserable for me. He's on me and he won't let me play.' He was very emotional about it."

Linn-Mar officials insist student well-being is a top priority in their school district.

"Our student safety is a primary concern. Number 1, always," said Dr. Quintin Shepherd, who became superintendent of Linn-Mar schools last July.

"Number 2, whenever there are allegations, we conduct an investigation to find out what happened."

Dr. Shepherd said the accusations by the Linn-Mar families are of "great concern" to the school district, but said he cannot reveal confidential personnel issues about district employees.

"None of that information is information I can share with you or with them," he told the Metro Sports Report. "It's a difficult situation for me."

"Were I a parent in this situation, I would want to know the level of detail that you're asking for. At the same time, there are employee rights to be protected."

"This is a situation that is incredibly frustrating to me," said Dr. Shepherd.

Mahmens offered similar comments Tuesday morning about student safety and said the allegations were being investigated.

Dr. Gustason, the Linn-Mar principal, said in his letter to the parents this week that the time

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lapse from when the alleged incidents occurred to when they were reported adversely affected the investigation.

In his letters, Dr. Gustason declared there was "insufficient evidence" to support the allegations, but said the school district is taking steps to ensure a safe environment for all its students. "The district is in the process of ensuring that a positive and constructive culture will be immediately modeled and implemented by all of the football coaching staff," he wrote.

When asked why the school district needs a new policy if no problems have occurred, he acknowledged that some families are unhappy with the school district and said it's a good idea to reinforce school district policy with all employees.

Forsyth, entering his ninth year as Linn-Mar's head coach, declined to answer questions about the specific allegations that have been lodged against his program, but said the football staff has worked hard to build the self-esteem, team skills and life skills of players needed for success.

"We've had eight or nine years of successfully building young men," he said.

Casebolt also declined to answer questions, but issued a statement to the Metro Sports Report. He is a health and physical education teacher in the Linn-Mar district and offensive coordinator for the varsity football team. He also is one of the supervisors for the weight room.

"I take great pride in my involvement with the Linn-Mar football program and in the classroom at Linn-Mar High School," he declared. "I continue to be proud of the work we do as a team and as a school to foster an environment of safety, structure, enthusiasm, energy, competitiveness and an unmatched spirit to succeed in all aspects of life. I am thankful for the outpouring of support from the community."

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Jeremy Jordan was a member of the football team this past season as a senior. Several other players have left the program due to the allegations of improper behavior by coaches.

Henrichs and other families are disappointed with the school district's response to their complaints, which is why they have decided to file their complaints with the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners. The BOEE is the same organization that investigated the complaints against former Cedar Rapids Washington football coach Tony Lombardi several years ago, an investigation that resulted in Lombardi being stripped of his coaching license for a year.

Henrichs expressed frustration with the school district in an interview last week.

"We're asking you to protect our kids," he said, summarizing his remarks to school officials. "One of the things we keep asking is, 'What is the school doing to protect our kids right now?' We are getting absolutely nothing, because they say it is personnel information.

"These coaches are walking around the hallways right now, doing the same stuff they've been doing the last eight years. It's like they're not even fazing them."

Bob Jordan expressed no confidence in the in-house investigation that was conducted by Linn-Mar officials.

"They're all married to one another now," he said. "They've got to protect each other to protect their positions."