

October 2, 2018

Department of Education
Office of the Secretary
Attn: Regulation Review

Subject: Proposed DIAA Regulations Regarding Out of Season Coaching by High School Coaches

Thank you for the opportunity to allow me to provide my comments on the DIAA out of season coaching regulations on high school coaches in the State of Delaware.

First, I have personally attended two recent DIAA Board Meeting (August and September) at the request of many parents to ensure their perspective on this topic and the impact that the existing regulations are having on their student-athletes is being heard and considered as the DIAA Board reviewed the out of the season coaching rules in response to the Senate Concurrent Resolution 79. I provided a public comment as well as several examples of impacts to different student athletes. I will share those examples again later in this letter. **I also stated clearly that the parents of our student-athletes are supporting a full rework of the DIAA's out of the season coaching regulations and believe that the decision and choice on who can and how their child should receive training for their athletic development belongs with them as the parent.**

Second, I would like to share during the DIAA August Board meeting when the DIAA board were discussing the out of the season regulations that there was a lot of confusion at the meeting about what was being asked by the board to review and approve. Multiple documents were shared and many of the board members asked for more time to review the documents and one board member even suggested that they delay any decision/vote until all of the board members had have the opportunity to review the changes more in depth and possibly complete a more thorough review of the regulations and suggest more beneficial changes to the regulations. At that point, it was stated that the changes that are being suggested by the Rules and Regulations committee were insignificant as the Rules and Regulations committee just reviewed the current out of the season coaching regulations to update some wording to meet the October 1, 2018 deadline that was put forth on them by the Senate. In fact, another comment was made that we addressed the Senate Concurrent Resolution 79 as our current regulations already address out of coaching season. It was also stated that they were no time to do any more review in order to meet October 1st deadline but they could possibly continue to review the regulations after the fact. One board member frankly stated that "We have done the bare minimum to meet the October 1st date." At this point, the DIAA board voted and approve the updated rules and regulations. **I have to say it was extremely disappointing to hear that meeting the October 1st date was more important than actually truly addressing the outdated out of the season coaching regulations that they were asked to review in Senate Concurrent Resolution 79.**

As a parent of a former Delaware high school student-athlete (my daughter is now at sophomore in college), I have witnessed over the years many times that the current out of season coaching rules in DIAA regulations have negatively impacted our student athletes and I personally experienced it with my own child. When my daughter was in 8th grade, she was participating in both a school basketball and club volleyball program. Her club volleyball team

was made up of a group of your closest junior high friends and were being coached by well-known and experienced high school volleyball coach at private high school. During the club season, the girls were playing well and bonded together so well as a team as they were all preparing to go through their separate ways for high schools, the team had agreed to come back together next year to play club again for the same coach. With their coaches and their players, they had the opportunity to be an elite team in the next year's club season. In February of the season, my daughter made a decision to go to the high school of their coach. At the point, the girls and parents realized if my daughter was to remain on the team the following season, they could not have the coaches again as it was a conflict with the DIAA regulations. The girls and parents then told my daughter that she would not be able to be on the team next year. My daughter was devastated. She went from being the team captain to no longer being wanted to be on the team with their friends. This time in her life that was supposed to be a happy and exciting time as she selected a home for the next four years was now dampened because of the choice that she was made on what high school was best for her academically and rules and regulations that limited who she can be coached by and in turn who she can now play with. However, the story does not end there. The club decided to assign another coach to that age group to keep the team together. This was less experienced coach; 23-year-old young lady that had minimal coaching experience. The club convinced the girls and the parents that this was a better option for the team and allowed them to stay together. For us, it initially seems like a great solution but the season was less than great. Besides the fact, the coach was unable to continue to build upon the previous year's success of the team and the training was sub-par, my daughter's physical well-being was put at risk when she took a blow to the head during the work assignment under the direct supervision of this coach. The coach, who was standing next to my daughter when it happened, did nothing but ask her if she was ok. Unlike an experienced and trained high school coach, she played my daughter for the remaining 3 matches after the blow and never informed us as parents of the incident. Several days later, after experiencing concussion symptoms for days, it was determined our daughter had a concussion. In the end, it was her high school volleyball coach that put us in the right direction to seeking proper diagnosis and treatment for our daughter. This season with the inexperienced coach left my daughter with a wasted year of training and concussion that was not properly handled. In addition, her teammates subtly blamed her for their dismal season because they took a chance with another coach and kept her on the team instead of having the coach they originally wanted. In the end, all of these student athletes, not just my daughter, were impacted in this situation and were denied receiving training from the coach of their choice. **Why should an old and out of date rule restrict their choice and restrict the student-athletes from receiving training from their coach of their choice?**

While this situation hits very close to home for me, this is just one example of actual student athletes that was negatively impacted by the rule. Just last November, I had a young lady approached me after her high school team had just ensured a trip to the semi-finals of the state tournament in tears. I asked her what was wrong; she said "Mrs. Leclerc, I am so upset. I cannot play with my team from last year's club season because my high school coach is the coach. All I want to do is play with my friends again. I am thinking of not playing." **Why should a rule restrict a student athlete from playing with their friends or even playing her sport?**

I would like to share a few other actual examples that I have witnessed. I share just the facts here but I cannot share the emotional impact to some of these student-athletes.

Example #1:

John Doe wants the opportunity to play for Coach Jones, who is an experienced and well-known coach with a successful high school program at Snickers High School. John Doe wants to play for Coach Jones during the school year but not during the DIAA season for that sport. Coach Jones is not John's current high school coach, however, the majority of the other participants in John's age group attend Snickers High School and play for Coach Jones. So, if John is going to play on a club team, the club team will need to have players from Coach Jones's high school team to complete it. John would not have the opportunity to be coached by Coach Jones and have teammates that are players from Coach Jones high school team.

Example #2

Jane Doe, who is now a freshman at Harmony High School has been playing basketball for the same AAU Black Panthers club since she was 11 years old. Coach Sharp is currently a volunteer basketball coach at Harmony High School and coaches the 15s AAU team for the Black Panthers Club. He has coached this age group for the last 8 years. Jane now has to leave her club that she enjoys and feels comfortable with because she is unable to play for their coach who happens to be a volunteer coach at her high school. Jane Doe is actually considering not playing basketball at her high school as the club season may give her opportunity to improve her skills.

Example #3

Sally Seasons, a junior at Millcroft High School, is the daughter of the assistant lacrosse coach at Millcroft High School. Her mother, Julie Seasons has been in this position for 10 years. Her mother and the head lacrosse coach, Coach Moore, have been coaching together for over ten years and are both school teachers at Millcroft High School. They also coach non-school affiliated cub lacrosse together in the off season (after DIAA lacrosse season is over but while school is in session). They coach the same age group for club that Sally would be a part of, so Sally cannot be on the team because of Coach Moore's DIAA restriction. Having Sally on another team creates undue hardship on the family and financial impact.

I truly believe that some of the best coaches in any given sport are at our high schools. Restricting these high school coaches from coaching their student athletes and in turn other student athletes limits our Delaware student-athletes from receiving the best training they can to excel in their sport. **This choice and decision should be put in the hands of the student-athlete and the parents, not restricted by rules and regulations. In the end, the student-athlete may feel it is more beneficial to be trained by their high school coach for nine months vs two-three months in the high school season. This is already happening to some of our high school programs.**

With that said, I understand that is a concern the high school coaches having the freedom to practice their full school team year around, (i.e. Basketball coaches should not be able to run team practices daily or even 3-4 times week practices during the off season during their academic year or summer outside their assigned season). I do not advocate for that type of regulation either. Many believe this could create undue pressure and possibly limit the participation in other sports. I am not sure if this would truly be the case especially when it is important to note that the majority of high school coaches have clearly stated that they do not want to coach their high school's student-athletes year around. **However, once again, it is the student-athlete's choice with the guidance of their parents and the responsibility of their parents to monitor any undue pressure and report any concerns to their athlete director.**

However, I do feel that high school coaches should have the opportunity to coach or mentor their own student athletes during the academic school year through outside organizations that are insured and governed by non-school affiliated local or national organization like USA Volleyball, AAU Basketball, etc. to ensure the coaches are monitored and regulated. I also think that these activities should have some restrictions to the number of athletes from their given school that they are able to coach to avoid the above concern I mentioned regarding practicing with their full team, but instead coaching our entire student-athlete population.

My understanding is that the DIAA board requested a proposal from two long time Delaware high school coaches regarding possible suggestions to change the out of season coaching regulation to focus on the goal of coaching all student-athletes, not full school teams. In addition, I understand that this document was drafted after reviewing the rules on out of season coaching from other states including Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia, New Jersey and West Virginia. I also understand that this proposal received input from many coaches, parents and athletic directors in the state and they have endorsed it. I believe this was one of the documents that was shared with the DIAA Board at August meeting. **In reviewing this document, it gives the opportunity for the student-athletes to have more access to whatever coach, including their own high school coach, that they choose and believe will give them the best opportunity to further grow in their sport but also limits the access to protect the student-athlete from other concerns that some have raised from out of the season coaching. Also, it gives the coaches that the opportunity to supplement their income and continue to practice their profession without undue restrictions. The proposal also addresses the concern that was raised by several DIAA board members about the insurance and compensation for these coaches' activities and requires those details to be the responsibility of non-school affiliated organization. This is in line with the Senate Concurrent Resolution 79 which did not ask for the member schools to provide payment or insurance for their high school coaches that were coaching in non-school affiliated organizations outside their assigned sport season. This proposal puts the choice back in the hands of the student-athlete and their parents where it belongs.**

I have also heard that one of the major concerns about changing the out of the season coaching rules is to the impact to multi-sport athlete. For the record, my daughter was a multi-sport daughter for the majority of her athlete career which included participation in the club volleyball program for 9 years. She only stopped being a multi-sport athlete her junior year to focus more on her junior year's tough academic schedule and in the end, she would have not made the varsity lacrosse team at her high school. Student-athletes and their parents are going to make the same decisions regarding how many sports they play regardless if they are able to train with their high school coach outside their school's season. They are making those decisions to specialize or not specialize already today. **At end of the day, limiting high school coaches from coaching their student-athletes in the off-season is not going to suddenly make student-athletes participate in more sports. We have to be realistic here as stated above, that decision is going to be made by the student athlete based on what they truly want to do. Parents are responsible for parenting their child and helping them make the decisions that they believe are best for their child's well-being. The bottom line is that the student-athlete is going to get the training if that is what they want to do and no outdated regulations should restrict their options or choices on how or from whom they get that training.**

I also would like to add that after attending the two DIAA board meetings and I had several DIAA board members encourage me to continue to press forward on the issue as it definitely needs to be change for our student-athletes and our high school coaches.

I would like to share with you an interesting statement I heard the other day from a long-time athletic director that has always been opposed to the allowing high school coaches to coach out of the season. The gist of her statement was, "Everyone is finding a way around the rule anyway so we should loosen it and get with the times so everyone can benefit."

Also, I would like to address the small proposed changes that the DIAA board is suggesting. While they believe they are insignificant, the DIAA board truly missed the impact and how they have expanded the impact to our rising high school student athletes. **By changing the regulations to include registered and accepted students in their school, not just returning players, the regulation is now impacting 8th grade students.** I will share two things— one as an example and one as a larger impact.

1. Michael Jackson, who is an 8th grader at Thriller Middle School, is playing club soccer for Coach Green in a club season that runs September through May. In February, Michael makes a decision to attend Billie Jean Academy and must register and pay his deposit by February 15th. Coach Green is the soccer's assistant coach at Bill Jean Academy. Once Michael registers, as a result of the proposed regulation's change in wording, Michael either needs to be removed from the team for the rest of the season or Coach Green needs to resign from either Billie Jean Academy or his club team. All options cause impact to Michael, Coach Green and the other players that are impacted by either Michael or Coach Green leaving the team mid-season. **Note: In the end, our experienced high school coaches may choose not to coach our 8th grader athletes which puts those athletes at the disadvantage at a critical time before they start to engage in more competitive school programs.**
2. At my daughter's middle school, we have had several high school coaches from multiple sports come to our schools to hold free skill training clinics. For many of these sports, they tend to be in the spring season. Once a student registers or accepts at a high school, they are unable to attend a clinic, camp, training etc. offered during their 8th grade by a coach at their high school. **Why is this fair to that athlete? Also, now the coach has to ensure none of the participants in any coaching activity are registered and accepted at their high school to avoid being sanctioned. Perhaps the best approach is to just stop supporting our younger student-athletes because it's too much work to make sure you are in compliance.**

I asked why is DIAA now looking to restrict the training for our younger student-athletes and in turn further restrict the opportunity for high school coaches to practice their profession or their passion to assist student-athletes in their athletic development.

A few other things to consider:

- **Restriction of Trade that the regulations are placing on professional coaches to limit their access to this livelihood.** All coaches should have the opportunity to coach as many potential athletes as they are able and want to. I know for a fact that there are many well skilled and experienced coaches choosing not to coach high school teams

because it limits their ability to effectively use their profession to support themselves and their families.

- DIAA is academic based athletics and club sports is a significant avenue for high school athletes to be seen by college coaches, recruited and given financial scholarships to attend college while playing the sport they love, which allows them to continue academic based athletics. **Student-athletes should have the choice to select any coach they believe will assist them in their academic based athletics goals.**

I recognize this submission is quite lengthy, but I believe the restriction on out of season coaching by high school coaches truly negatively impacts both our student-athletes and our coaches in many ways and I wanted to ensure all of the concerns and situations were presented from a parent's perspective.

I respectfully ask two things:

- 1) The proposed changes to the regulations not be implemented as they further restrict high school coaches from coaching our younger student-athletes.**
- 2) The DIAA Board and Rules and Regulations Committee properly perform due diligence to review the current rules and regulations as requested by the Senate Concurrent Resolution 79 to bring the out of the season regulations more in line with the current environment and other states for the betterment of our student athletes, coaches and athletic programs. Understanding the intent of Senate Concurrent Resolution 79, it was clearly not met and further changes are required.**

Respectfully submitted,
Trina Leclerc
Parent of Former Delaware High School Student-Athlete
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