

IS HOOP HERO'S JOB ON THE LINE?

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 07 October 2016 06:08



A mystery surrounds the Gallup High School athletic department.

A high-profile coach is no longer the head coach of the Lady Bengals' basketball team, and the program – one of New Mexico's most successful – stands at a crossroads, with only Superintendent Frank Chiapetti privy to the direction in which the situation is headed. And he's keeping answers about the matter guarded.

"It's a personnel matter," Chiapetti said through a school-district phone receptionist Oct. 4, when the Sun asked for clarification on the matter. "You'll have to submit a formal request to the school district's attorney to get a copy of the letter."

The Sun submitted a request for the letter under the New Mexico Inspection of Public Records Act on Oct. 5.

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The letter in question was sent some weeks ago to Lady Bengals' head coach Kamau Turner, and it came from the school district's main office, according to GHS Athletic Director James Malcolm.

Like Chiapetti, Malcolm wouldn't say much. Dominic Romero, principal at Gallup High, did not immediately return a phone call seeking comment.

"There was a letter sent about the coaching status of the girls basketball team," Malcolm said. "I can tell you that we have not had any interviews as far as the girls coaching job is concerned. That's about all I know at the moment."

During the public comment portion of the Oct. 3 school-board meeting, several parents spoke out against the secrecy of the school district, which is not letting parents or students in on Turner's job status.

Turner, an Oklahoma native, has coached the Lady Bengals since 2010. His job stint includes a 28-1 2015 season wherein the District 1-5A Lady Bengals lost to Roswell 59-41 at state and were ranked as high as No. 49 in the U.S.

Turner's job status, and the silence by school officials on the matter, has the Gallup sports community waiting for answers.

"It's a slap in the face. He's done a great job. Look at all the banners on the wall," Paulette Begay, whose daughter plays for the Lady Bengals, told school board members Oct. 3.

"That's our pride and joy. He believes in the girls so much. Get our coach back in there," Begay said to applause from an audience that included both Bengal players and parents.

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Jennifer Gillson, also a parent of a child who attends a Gallup-McKinley County school, took issue with the way the board deals with most matters.

“We are Gallup Strong,” Gillson said. “Gallup Strong.”

Gillson talked about the need for the school district to fix the potholes – she mentioned Crownpoint and Tohatchi — parents must fathom on a daily basis when dropping their kids off to school. With the start of basketball season about a month away, Gillson and Begay asked the panel to quickly resolve the head-coach matter.

“He deserves to be where he wants to be,” Begay told board members. “Do it for the kids.”

At least one parent who spoke during the public segment said she thinks Turner received the letter at the end of July. She didn't elaborate on the comment.

Begay said school officials are making matters worse by not acting, adding that the girls continuously inquire about their coach.

GHS

The Gallup High Lady Bengals open the 2016 basketball season Nov. 9 in an away-game against Shiprock High School.

Turner, who teaches full-time at Gallup High, attended the Oct. 3 meeting, but did not speak. He has produced winning teams of superb individual talent like that of N'Aisha McIntosh who graduated last year and is now a freshman at New Mexico Junior College in Hobbs.

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