

Does Chiapetti Have Proof that Turner Dropped the Ball?

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 14 October 2016 05:26



LETTER CONTAINS ACCUSATIONS

A matter involving a popular basketball coach who's no longer at the helm of one of New Mexico's most successful girls basketball programs has raised questions among Gallup High School students and their parents. A letter kept guarded until its recent release to the Sun doesn't fully clarify the situation, and some suggest the matter needs further investigation.

A two-page letter dated July 25, 2016, sent from Gallup-McKinley County Schools Superintendent Frank Chiapetti to Gallup High School girls basketball coach Kamau Turner gives notice that Turner's coaching contract with the McKinley district is null and void.

"I am writing you as Superintendent of Schools for Gallup-McKinley County to give notice that you will not be issued an employment contract as a coach for the school district for the 2016-2017 school year," Chiapetti begins the letter. "Your Title IX compliance, now and in the past, and the financial oversight of your program has been suspect, at best, and the combining of your official duties as a coach with your participation in a third-party fundraising entity makes

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your continued employment as coach impossible.”

Title IX is part of the U.S. Educational Amendments of 1972. It states that no person shall be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity that receives federal financial assistance on the basis of sex.

The letter continues: “While the investigation into your financial oversight and interaction with Full Court Prestige Club is still ongoing, the appearance of a conflict of interest, at this time, is too great to ignore, and I find it is not in the best interests of the student athletes involved in the program for you to be a coach.”

It is not immediately clear as to how Title IX figures in to the Turner situation, and the July 25 letter sent to Turner by Chiapetti does not elaborate on that detail.

Joan Nez, secretary for the Gallup-McKinley County Schools’ Board of Education, asked that the question be put to the school district in the form of an email.

There was no response to the Sun as of press time.

The matter stems from what folks at a recent McKinley County Board of Education meeting call a big misunderstanding, notions based on club-versus-school-district funds.

Gloria Watts, a retired educator and Turner’s mother, spoke at the meeting and advised the board to take action against the Chiapetti directive. The allegations are false and bogus, she suggested.

She said that she believes Chiapetti is mistaking the full Court Prestige Club for a public entity. She said the club is private, and therefore not subject to school district regulations.

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Watts is a cousin of former U.S. Congressman J.C. Watts of Oklahoma, who made headlines as a rare black Republican who served the U.S. House of Representatives. J.C. Watts was also the starting quarterback for the University of Oklahoma in the late 1970s.

Turner, who has coached the Lady Bengals since 2009, continues to teach full-time at Gallup High School, and Chiapetti's letter did not reference the teaching side of his role at the school. But school-board meeting attendees say they want Turner back as coach.

"This is an attempt to make [Turner] look bad in public," Watts said of the contents of the Chiapetti letter.

The Sun requested the letter in question from the school district, but last week Chiapetti responded by saying a copy would have to be obtained through a formal New Mexico Inspection of Public Records Act request. A copy of the letter was provided to The Sun by alternative means.

"This is the continuation of a pattern of harassment by Chiapetti toward Coach Turner," Watts said after the meeting. "What [Chiapetti] is doing is an escalating attempt to mar Coach Turner's relationship with the community and the school and the state. Plain and simple, this is an attempt to destroy the Gallup High School girls basketball program."

The team is respected around New Mexico and the United States, with frequent post-season appearances by the team over the years.

A girls' basketball coach at Gallup High has not been named this year and Gallup athletic director James Malcolm told the Sun last week that there have been no coaching interviews to date.

Gallup High went 28-1 in District 1-5A in 2015 and was ranked as high as No. 49 in the country.

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Turner, who grew up in Oklahoma, has not returned repeated telephone requests for comment on the matter nor has first-year GHS Principal Dominic Romero. Romero is a former athletic director at the school.

Watts said the Turner family is in the midst of hiring an employment attorney to oversee the matter. The school district appears adamant in its stance.

“It is the school district’s hope that this matter can be resolved amicably and quickly to avoid the need for litigation,” Chiapetti concludes in the letter.

Meanwhile, Watts said she has sent an IPRA request to Joan Nez, superintendent secretary and the McKinley school district’s custodian of records, and asked for athletics equity data reports spanning 2009 through 2013.

By Bernie Dotson

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