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Trash-talk gets its hearing

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As quarterback for Lakeland and an all-section lacrosse player for Lakeland/Panas, Brian Prunty has heard cursing and other harsh comments on the field of play. / Matthew Brown/The Journal News

Written by **Brian Heyman**

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Brian Prunty has heard the bad words out there on the high school field.

“People just cursing at each other, just telling each other how bad they are, stuff like that,” said Prunty, an all-league football player for Lakeland and an all-section lacrosse player for Lakeland/Panas.

Stepinac basketball player Naim Thomas has heard nasty things on the court about “mothers and fathers, and even cousins if the player knows you.”

This is trash-talking. The New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) recently announced a crackdown starting this school year — especially geared toward taunts regarding race, ethnicity, religion, gender, disability or sexual orientation — whether it’s from athletes, coaches or fans.

Now New York will talk about whether to take out more of the trash-talk, too. Robert Zayas, executive director of the New York State Public High School Athletic Association, said it might be a good time

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Stepinac's Naim Thomas says he wouldn't want to see a fan's comments result in a technical foul. / Seth Harrison/The Journal News

Brian Prunty, Lakeland senior

"Trash-talking is definitely a part of all sports. But when it turns into stuff like that, like ethnic and racial comments, the punishment should definitely be there, because even though you want to play with energy, that's like crossing the line."

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to discuss this with sectional officials during the organization's summer meeting in Rochester at the end of the month.

"I think the biggest thing is to make sure everybody is aware of what's happened in New Jersey, and then just simply have a discussion: Is there a need to make our rules and regulations even more stringent than what they currently are?" Zayas said.

The New Jersey governing body mandates that athletes or coaches ejected for "unsportsmanlike and flagrant verbal or physical misconduct" be suspended for the next game if it's football or the next two regularly scheduled events in other sports.

But the crackdown, done in conjunction with the state attorney general's office and its division on civil rights, specifies that comments made about race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or disability are unsportsmanlike, must be reported to the division on civil rights, and may be investigated by the NJSIAA. Ejections aren't automatic, but the officials have the power to do so.

The initiative is a follow-up to New Jersey's 2011 Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights for schools. So this is what team captains and possibly the rest of the athletes will hear from the officials before each event:

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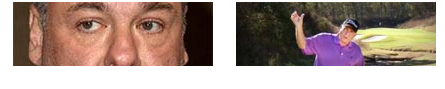


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