

# Analysis: LHSAA's crackdown on Lafayette Christian's use of non-faculty coaches raises questions

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Even if the parties involved are unwilling to comment on the issue publicly, let's start with the facts as best we know them.

Almost three weeks ago, Lafayette Christian Academy was at least one school that was reprimanded by the Louisiana High School Athletic Association for the use of non-faculty head coaches in the sports of football and basketball. LCA faces a hefty fine and the suspension of four coaches — athletic director Barry Baldwin, football coach Trev Faulk, boys basketball Errol Rogers and girls basketball Devin Lantier — for a calendar year.

The school plans to appeal the punishment, a serious one for a school moving up in class next year.

The news was first reported last week by KATC, Lafayette's ABC affiliate, and later confirmed by The Acadiana Advocate through a source familiar with the situation. LCA president Jay Miller declined comment, preferring to wait until the LHSAA publicly announces the punishment.

In a statement, the LHSAA said: "In order to protect the integrity of any/all communications between the LHSAA offices and the LHSAA

membership as well as to ensure its confidentiality between the LHSAA and the member schools, the LHSAA will not release information on infractions, violations, penalty rulings or sanctions until any/all potential and/or allowable administrative remedies are exhausted."

According to bylaw 3.4.3 in the LHSAA handbook: "A school shall not allow non-faculty personnel to serve as the head coach in the sports of football and boys' and girls' basketball. With written permission from the principal, non-faculty assistant coaches shall be allowed to serve as the head coach and faculty representative of a sub-varsity squad in these sports."

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In LCA's case, it appears to have violated the rule twice.

For the past three years, Faulk has served as the Knights' football coach as a non-faculty member, leading them to back-to-back Division IV state championships in 2017 and 2018. On the LHSAA website, Baldwin is listed as the football coach and is present on the sideline at every game, but in at least a traditional sense, Faulk coaches the team.

In girls basketball, Lantier, another non-faculty member, replaced Errol Rogers as the Lady Knights' head coach this past year when Rogers took LCA's open boys basketball coaching job. Byron Starks, who led the LCA boys to state championships in 2017 and 2018, left to become

the head coach of the new LSU-Eunice men's basketball program. Rogers then took over and led the Knights to a three-peat. Lantier, Rogers' former assistant, did the same with the girls.

Like Baldwin with football, Rogers is listed as the girls basketball coach and sits on the bench at every game, but Lantier ran varsity practices and called plays.

The conflict between who is the head coach in the LHSAA's eyes and who is the actual head coach is most apparent at state championship events, leading to confusing and awkward situations.

Before state championships, the LHSAA presents game balls to head coaches. In football and girls basketball, Baldwin and Rogers have walked onto the field or court to receive those, not Faulk and Lantier. Then during postgame interview sessions at state championship events, Baldwin and Rogers are forced to answer questions from the media when they haven't been running practices and calling plays all year.

Lantier wasn't even allowed to stand up during games in the state tournament this year, as head basketball coaches often do.

Using non-faculty members as coaches in every other sport is not only allowed but common in Louisiana high schools. Small schools, especially, often don't have the resources to hire coaches in every sport who are also faculty members. Moreover, many coaches are unwilling, for whatever reason, to be faculty members.

As long as these non-faculty coaches have certification in the LHSAA's Coaches Education and Certification Program, then they can be a

head coach in sports outside of football and basketball.

Though any and all rule changes can be proposed and voted upon by principals at the LHSAA's annual convention, including previous and future changes to this rule, the rule has yet to be altered to allow for CECP head coaches in basketball and football.

Dwain Jenkins, the football and athletic director at Litcher who also served as president of Louisiana High School Coaches Association and Louisiana Football Coaches Association believes "faculty coaches are important in all sports."

Jenkins emphasized that the opinions he shared with The Acadiana Advocate via text are his own and not necessarily those of the LHSCA or the LFCA.

"I believe if you interview administrators across the country the common opinion would be once non-faculty coaches were allowed the sports became more club like than education based," Jenkins said. "Texas still requires all coaches to be full-time faculty members. I believe the football and basketball coaches have been united in trying to protect the profession of coaching."

"I appreciate the work that CECP coaches do across the state but I believe there needs to be more continuing education for all coaches across the state," Jenkins added. "There needs to be more than a one time online course to certify coaches in Louisiana."

It's difficult to know exactly how many non-faculty coaches lead football and basketball programs in the state, but it does happen, especially in basketball. Some schools in the past have needed non-

faculty members to coach a team that is at risk of folding.

For other schools, the faculty member who is reported to the LHSAA as the head coach in football and basketball still plays a role in the daily functions of the team, such as scheduling, paying officials and arranging transportation. This raises the question about what the LHSAA views the head coach's responsibilities to entail.

If it includes running practices and calling plays, then LCA is certainly in violation of the rule. If those aren't requirements — and the head coach on paper is at least present at games — then maybe the Knights aren't.

But the Knights may have come under the microscope due to their immense success in athletics recently. LCA has won nine state championships in four sports over the last three years, and there appearances at state championship events have made the rule violation seem more blatant.

But LCA's two non-faculty coaches aren't exactly unqualified to lead a high school program. In Faulk's case, his credentials are unassailable.

Aside from graduating from LSU with a degree in business in three years, he served as a faculty member while head football coach at his two previous schools, Vermilion Catholic and Northside.

Though Lantier doesn't have the same qualifications, he coached under Rogers, the former head coach of the UL women's program, for five years. Aside from coaching at LCA, Lantier is a business owner in Lafayette.

"If we as a state will continue to allow CECIP coaches to be head coaches, I would like to see more professional development of those coaches to be sure the value of interscholastic athletics are being promoted," Jenkins said. "I still believe traditional teacher-coaches are important to the development of student-athletes."