

Missouri appeals court denies SPS petition to reverse athletic eligibility of Glendale QB

A request by Springfield Public Schools to reverse the playing eligibility of a student athlete was denied Tuesday by the Missouri Court of Appeals.

The quick denial clears the way for Glendale High School senior Kylan Mabins to take the football field Friday for his new team when they play Kickapoo High School — the school he left in March.

The district [filed a petition for an "immediate stop order and Writ of Prohibition" Friday](#) to reverse the eligibility of Mabins and keep Greene County Judge Derek Ankrom from taking any more action in the case other than to vacate the Sept. 22 preliminary injunction that allowed Mabins to play.

In a separate filing, the district sought to remove Ankrom as the judge for this case.

Mabins was a starting quarterback for Kickapoo during his sophomore and junior years but transferred to Glendale in March, citing hardship reasons. The district flagged the transfer request and the Missouri State High School Activities Association ruled he was ineligible to play for the rest of his senior year believing the transfer was due, in part, to athletic reasons and a prior relationship with the Glendale coaching staff.

The MSHSAA ruling was unanimously upheld on appeal and the Mabins family filed a lawsuit against MSHSAA and SPS to regain eligibility.

Attorney Jay Kirksey, who represents the Mabins, said the family is still seeking to make the temporary injunction permanent.

"They (SPS) filed a change of judge against Judge Ankrom because they did not like his decision," Kirksey said. "If you like the decision of the judge, obviously you don't change judge."

Sean and Darline Mabins sought the hardship transfer for their son, alleging at Kickapoo he was subjected to "racial discrimination and a racially hostile environment" to the point it was interfering with his academic success and mental health.

The family also alleged Kickapoo athletic staff retaliated by flagging the transfer request.

According to guidelines for MSHSAA, which determines athletic eligibility and imposes sanctions on programs that break the rules, students can seek a hardship transfer for "unforeseen, unavoidable or unavailable circumstances" as long as the transfer was "not for athletic reasons and there was no undue influence."

The student athlete developed a coaching and training relationship with members of the Mauk family — the sons of then-head football coach Mike Mauk — starting at Cherokee Middle School and his freshman year at Kickapoo.

The Mabins family sought to transfer their son to Glendale prior to the start of his freshman year but after an SPS official warned Kylan's prior relationship with the Mauk family might jeopardize his athletic eligibility, they opted to remain at Kickapoo.

More: [Attorney hired by SPS to investigate Mabins complaint says 'no evidence' of discrimination](#)

In the appeal, SPS argued the Mabins family did not report complaints of racial bias or a toxic environment during the student's freshman or sophomore years nor did it come up in calls and emails between Sean Mabins and the Kickapoo head coach from July 2020 to March 2023.

The district hired Mickes O'Toole, an education law firm in St. Louis, to [separately investigate the Mabins' allegations of discrimination and retaliation](#). In a report obtained by the News-Leader, its investigator found wholly in favor of the district.

The report said the allegations made by the family were unsubstantiated and a board policy prohibiting the alleged transgressions had not been violated.

"This is an unfortunate situation that holds far-reaching implications beyond one student athlete. In fact, the ability to enforce the fair governance of high school athletics and activities in Missouri is at stake," said Stephen Hall, chief communications officer for SPS. "While we are disappointed by today's denial of the writ of prohibition, it does not change the recent findings of the investigation that found the plaintiff's claims to be unsubstantiated. The plaintiff's false claims have now been refuted on multiple fronts – by SPS, by the Missouri State High School Activities Association and by the independent investigator."

In the statement, Hall added: "SPS will not remain silent while the integrity and professional reputations of our staff are unfairly targeted. Ultimately, the case remains pending in the Greene County Circuit Court and the final outcome is not yet clear."

SPS [provided a range of documents to the appeals court](#) including transfer forms, the results of eligibility investigations by SPS and MSHSAA, and transcripts of prior court appearances.

Kirksey said the appeals court ruling Tuesday reinforces the earlier decision by Ankrom to allow Mabins to play sports this year.

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