

OSSAA rule harms student athletes

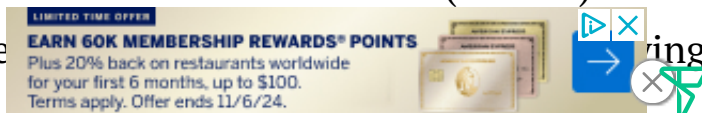
By Jonathan Small / Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs
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Jonathan Small



Each year, parents across Oklahoma pay for their children to attend sports camps. Those parents may be surprised to learn that the Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association (OSSAA) now treats attendance at those camps as an expense when determining eligibility for participating in any sport for a year.



It's an idiotic rule adopted for no good reason. The OSSAA should repeal it. Otherwise, it's only a matter of time until the organization is forced to do so by successful lawsuits.

Under OSSAA's Rule 24, if a student athlete attended a camp, and later transfers or moves into a public school district that employs a coach who worked at that camp, the student is barred from participating in any sports at his or her new school district for a year.

So, if you attend a basketball camp and move into the "wrong" district, you're also banned from playing football or baseball or running track.

The OSSAA justifies this nonsense by claiming it wants to crack down on "recruitment" of student athletes.

But this ignores the reality of youth athletics today. Students routinely attend camps to hone their skills, get exercise, or ensure that students are doing something productive, and coaches are free to pursue those work opportunities.

To require parents to limit a child's participation in sports camps based on concern that you might someday move into a new district has no basis in logic.

Also, Oklahoma law allows open transfer between districts, so long as an admitting school has capacity. The OSSAA's rule undermines that law.

Furthermore, families routinely move due to new opportunities and family circumstances. It happens all the time. If a child legally attends a school district, that child should be allowed to participate in sports (pursuant to academic eligibility) – full stop.

According to data reported by public schools, at least \$265.8 million in taxpayer funds is spent annually on the salaries of athletic staff (and far more is spent on athletic facilities). Oklahoma families who pay those taxes should get the benefit.

Attorney General Gentner Drummond has sent the OSSAA a “cease and desist” letter, saying enforcement of this rule “lends itself for arbitrary and capricious enforcement and to confused compliance.”

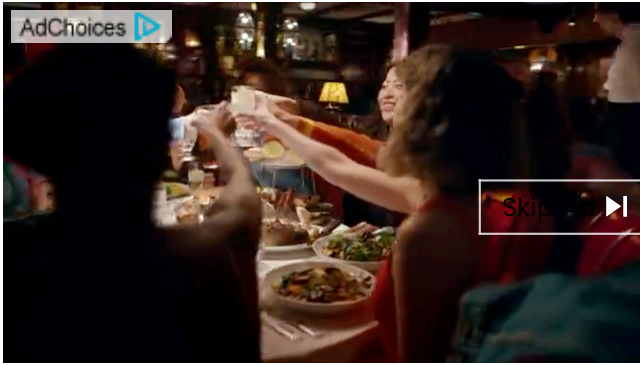
The OSSAA has already dealt with one prominent lawsuit linked to its effort to bar students from participating in sports.

Kayleb Barnett attended Broken Arrow when he lived with his mother, but when he moved to live with his father in the Jenks district, OSSAA tried to prevent Barnett from playing sports at Jenks. OSSAA backed down only after Barnett’s family sued.

Courts have held that OSSAA is a state actor. If this nonsense is the best OSSAA has to offer Oklahomans, it may be time for state officials allow another group to take its place.



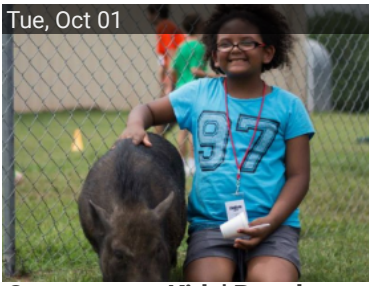
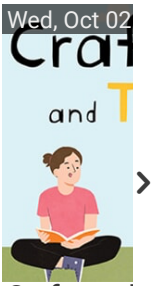
Jonathan Small serves as president of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs (www.ocpathink.org).

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