



Ad



Appeals board overturns FHSAA, restores eligibility for 5 First Academy players

Story by Buddy Collings, Orlando Sentinel • 2d

A Florida High School Athletic Association appeals committee on Wednesday unanimously voted to modify an FHSAA staff ruling and [restore eligibility](#) for five The First Academy football players who were among more than 30 who transferred to the Orlando private school prior to the start of the 2024 football season.

The five-person Section 2 appeals committee heard sworn statements and overturned a [September ruling by FHSAA executive director Craig Damon](#) that made the players ineligible to play for TFA for 365 days from the date of their infraction(s). The penalty

was reduced to "time-served" for the players, who sat out a Sept. 13 district game against Melbourne Central Catholic played the week after the FHSAA sent a letter of sanctions to First Academy.

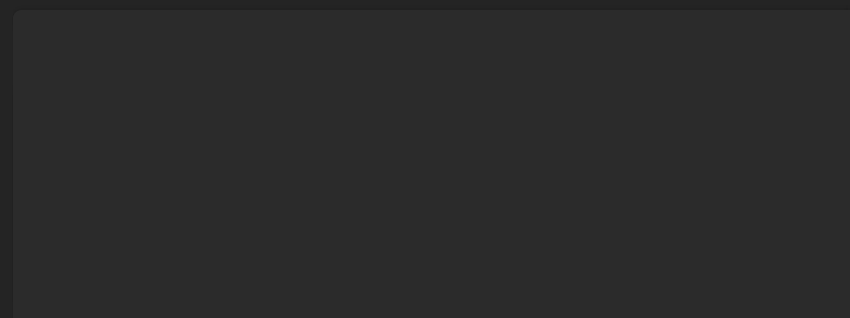
Frank Kruppenbacher, an attorney representing TFA, issued this statement to the Orlando Sentinel:

"We are thankful to the FHSAA Sectional Appeals Committee, which met regarding alleged impermissible benefits being provided to student-athletes at The First Academy. The committee studied the evidence carefully, asked questions insightfully, and ruled equitably. We are delighted that these students are immediately eligible. These five tremendous young men look forward to using their God-given gifts this Friday night as they compete against a nationally recognized high school football program from Georgia."

The First Academy (6-0), which has climbed to No. 1 in the FHSAA Class 1A power rankings, has a 7 p.m. Friday home game against Rabun Gap-Nacoochee (4-2), ranked 16th in Georgia by MaxPreps.

[TFA challenges FHSAA ruling; seeks assist from governor and state legislators](#)

The players named on FHSAA documents are Demetrice McCray, a star junior receiver; junior defensive ends Alex Willis and DJ Whiley; Trintin Thomas, a junior lineman; and Aden Hall, a senior linebacker.



According to documents provided by the FHSAA to the Orlando Sentinel after Wednesday's hearing, the appeal committee acknowledged that violations occurred but reduced the penalties after hearing TFA's case. It made three motions concerning the eligibility issue, all approved by a 5-0 vote.

One said a student was inadvertently included in a "self-report" document and should not be punished.

A second suggested that a one-year suspension was excessive. It said having to sit out the MCC game was punishment enough.

The third motion matched the decision to reduce the suspension to one game for a fifth player who was found to have received two impermissible benefits.

Previous FHSAA reports said players were provided a



Sign in

Uber rides" to school for players.

Moffett has not coached in games since the Royals started 3-0. He told the Sentinel he was suspended from coaching for six weeks.

The sectional committee for Central Florida includes Apopka athletic director Aaron Crawford, Olympia A.D. Russell Wambles and Lake County attorney Michael Graves, a public defender for the Fifth Judicial Circuit.

Per the FHSAA website, appeals committees are impartial judges for the FHSAA's due process system. It allows schools and players to appeal rulings and is designed "to make sure the student-athletes in our state all receive equal and fair opportunities."

The policy does allow the FHSAA director to ask the association's full board of directors to review appeals decisions. The next board meeting is Nov. 4.

Multiple area football coaches have said TFA invited

te school.

omplaints has

an be



1



contacted at beemings@orlandosentinel.com. Chris Hays contributed to this report.

©2024 Orlando Sentinel. Visit orlandosentinel.com.
Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.



More for You



