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Fairfax Co. coaches frustrated with Hayfield decision say they will continue playoff games

by 7News Staff

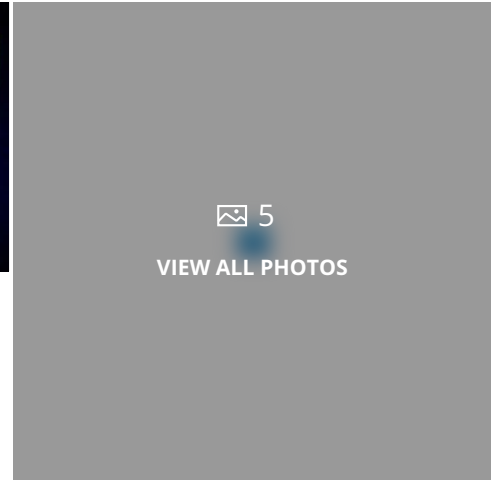
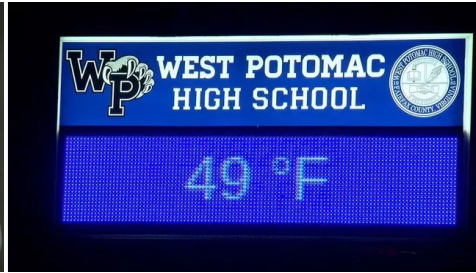
Thu, November 21st 2024 at 12:19 PM

Updated Thu, November 21st 2024 at 6:33 PM



Play





Hayfield high school football (7News)



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FAIRFAX COUNTY, Va. (7News) — High school football playoff games in Northern Virginia are set to continue Thursday and Friday night after football coaches for six Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) threatened to boycott over accountability with Hayfield Secondary School.

Coaches for Fairfax High, Lake Braddock Secondary, West Springfield High, South County High, West Potomac High, and Edison High sent a letter to FCPS superintendent Dr. Michelle Reid announcing their decision to allow their players to hit the field for the Virginia High School League (VHSL) Region 6C playoffs.

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The coaches for six high schools making up a majority of the 6C region bracket threatened to forfeit their playoff games unless FCPS held the school accountable, but have since said they wanted their players to get a playoff experience.

"We owe it to our players, their families, and our communities to honor their hard work, dedication, and commitment to the game," a portion of the letter read. "We do not want our players to miss out on any part of their high school football career."

Read their letter to Dr. Reid below:

Dear Dr. Reid,

As football coaches representing six schools in the Virginia High School League (VHSL) Region 6C, we want to make clear that, despite Fairfax County Public Schools' (FCPS) lack of transparency and the decision to allow a school found in violation of VHSL regulations to participate in the Virginia state playoffs, we have collectively decided that our teams will compete in the postseason. We owe it to our players, their families, and our communities to honor their hard work, dedication, and commitment to the game. We do not want our players to miss out on any part of their high school football careers.

As coaches, we strive to teach our players the importance of competing with integrity and adhering to the rules, but those lessons lose their meaning when violations are allowed to go unchecked at the highest levels. The district's failure to address this matter adequately has created frustration and disillusionment among players, coaches, and families throughout the district.

We appreciate that steps are being taken to implement rules to prevent such situations in the future. We look forward to the December meeting as an opportunity to address the current rules and policies related to the issues we've raised. Additionally, we know a crucial aspect of any forward steps will be to review the redacted investigation reports to gain transparency into the division's actions during its self-determined thorough investigation. It is deeply disheartening that our current athletes—especially seniors—are bearing the brunt of the consequences this season. Their hard work, dedication, and love for the game are being overshadowed by a situation that could and should have been prevented.

Sincerely,

Trey Taylor – Fairfax High School

Mike Dougherty – Lake Braddock Secondary School

Anthony Parker – West Springfield High School

Gerry Pannoni – South County High School

Chadwick Louisville – West Potomac High School

Chad Lewis – Edison High School

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The decision follows Wednesday's meeting with the Superintendent, though they look forward to addressing their issues in December.

Those same coaches issued a letter Tuesday expressing disappointment in FCPS leadership for not looking into player eligibility at Hayfield Secondary School. In early November, VHSL officials suspended Hayfield from playoff games for two years, citing the eligibility of 14 players who transferred to the school from Liberty High School in Woodbridge.

A Fairfax County judge put the playoff ban on hold until a Dec. 4 hearing. Dr. Reid supported the judge's ruling, claiming the VHSL's rule's "ambiguities" and "inconsistencies" vindicated the court's decision, [per a letter sent to FCPS families](#) on Wednesday.

However, some still expressed disappointment with the VHSL and FCPS leadership, one of whom Virginia State Senator Stella Pekarsky. Pekarsky issued the following statement on Thursday:

In recent days, it has become abundantly clear that our students have been let down by the adults around them. The integrity and sportsmanship of school sports must be protected at all costs, particularly because the actions of adults send a clear message to our students.

High school sports are not, and cannot, become the free agent game of colleges. Our students should not be recruited, encouraged, or asked to move to schools by coaches. These actions are not only unethical, but also go against the rules of VHSL, which coaches and schools agree to before being allowed to participate. At the end of the day, however, students do not have the ability to move alone.

The timeline of the decisions made, including from the courts, have hurt our students. I cannot imagine the excitement of Robinson players while they prepared to play in a playoff game, just to be sent home at the last minute. As a mother of high school student athletes, I know how hard parents work to fundraise for our programs and support our children in their passions. The complete disregard with which decisions were made resulted in the devastating financial losses for our Boosters is shocking.

I have spoken to both Supt. Dr. Michelle Reid and Dr. Billy Haun to express my disappointment in the position we find ourselves in today. I have urged them to work together to address the current situation and to find ways to strengthen the cracks that have clearly come to light in eligibility and recruitment.

I am encouraged to see the steps that FCPS and the VHSL have put into place to address this situation, but understand that for many students and families, this remains an incredibly difficult situation. I hope FCPS and the VHSL continue to do everything they can to never find ourselves in this situation again and to conduct an independent investigation.

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I know that we are united in our desire to ensure a level playing field for student athletes that models ethical and good sportsmanship.


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SergeantMajor



16h ago

I thought all the coaches signed a letter stating they would forfeit the playoff games.
Guess they lied!

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