



Illustration by Mattie Lubchansky

HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

How An Imported State Champion Blew Up Virginia High School Football

By **Dave McKenna**

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Administrators at Hayfield Secondary School in Alexandria, Va., set out late last year to create a football powerhouse. The principal and athletic director, both new to the school, recruited the coach from Freedom High School, a school located in a neighboring county that had claimed the state title the previous two seasons and was in the [Top 40](#) nationally. One high school poaching a football coach from another isn't all that noteworthy, unless, as in this case, all his top players and coaching staff come with him.

Basically, the best team in the state was invited to just change its address and uniforms and get back to whipping everybody's ass. And they accepted. It's been all ugliness ever since. Hayfield put together the most talked-about schoolboy football juggernaut to hit Alexandria since the 1971 team at T.C. Williams, the squad that inspired the *Remember the Titans*. This ain't the feel-good drama that one was, however. The administration's pre-fab superteam scheme fell into place so fast and was so successful—the Hawks went 9-0 with a scoring differential of [563-13](#) against other public schools—that it produced multiple investigations for rule-breaking, a postseason ban, lawsuits, and an 11th-hour court injunction. In between all of that was a whole bunch of uncompetitive football.

While Hayfield was running up scores, an equal and opposite reaction to that school's scheming could be observed about a half hour down I-95 in Woodbridge, Va. That's where the Freedom football team was reduced from champs to chumps overnight. The Prince William County school came into this season with a 29-game winning streak, but the exodus of coaches and players left the cupboards so empty that Freedom barely even fielded a team this year. The Eagles played just seven of 10 scheduled games while citing a lack of available players. Even with just a partial season, Freedom was outscored 392-10.

Nobody from Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), from superintendent Michelle Reid on down to the Hayfield coaches, will talk on the record about what happened at the school. Here's but one sign of how weird all the folks responsible have been acting this season: To get football stats from a Hayfield game, FCPS made me file a FOIA request.

"We need to fix it now, on the front end," Mateo Dunne, an elected member of the Fairfax County School Board told me this summer, shortly after the board ignored his calls for an independent investigation of how a turnkey championship football team arrived in his county. "If not, imagine 10 years

from now, what high school sports programs will look like. It's going to create a free-agent market in high school sports. The ramifications of this will be felt for years. Only bad things can come."

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The mess started last winter, when Hayfield principal Darin Thompson and athletic director Monty Fritts dismissed football coach [Said Aziz](#). When Aziz, a veteran coach in the area, came to Hayfield in 2021, the team had won only two games total in the previous two years. Aziz turned things around and his squad finished atop its conference, the National District, all three seasons he was at the school. But under Aziz, the Hawks had no playoff wins. Thompson and Fritz, who were in their first year at Hayfield, wanted more out of the program. Much more. A former Hayfield football parent, who also requested anonymity citing fear of reprisal, told me Thompson and Fritts were open about having pie-in-the-sky goals for a public-school program after canning Aziz. "They talked about wanting to play on television, playing on ESPN, traveling to play in California," said the parent. "I thought, 'This is a public school?'"

When Defector contacted Aziz last month, he cited concern for his continued employment as a teacher in Fairfax County Public Schools and declined to discuss his dismissal or the Hayfield situation. He did, however, admit that he was struggling emotionally over no longer having a coaching job. I asked if he left Hayfield on his own. "No," he said.

"There's a lot wrong with the Hayfield thing," said Dale Eaton, an Alexandria native who coached high school football in Fairfax County for decades. "But, man, it bothers me that nobody recognizes what they did to Aziz. Nobody cares!"

Thompson had previously been a principal at Thomas Jefferson High School in Richmond, Va., where another public school, John Marshall High School,

developed a dominant basketball program and became a magnet school for hoops by turning the reins over to an AAU coach. Marshall had shoe and apparel contracts, was appearing on ESPN, and, despite an overall enrollment of about 500 kids, [was the top-ranked team in the country](#) last year. And Fritts learned the ropes at Friendship Collegiate, a D.C. public charter school that built a nationally recognized football program through ruthless recruiting. Plenty of allegations were made about how Friendship's [headhunting went beyond D.C.'s borders](#), which was blatantly against the rules for a city public school. But nobody nitpicked about residency while the football team was playing a national schedule, getting its games on ESPN, and [putting kids in college](#) at an astounding rate.

After discarding Aziz, Thompson and Fritts pursued the one guy in the state likeliest to bring them what they craved: Darryl Overton, the head coach from Freedom High School. Overton has for years run private sports training and apparel retailing businesses in the Washington, D.C. market, most under the name Playmakers Elite Athletic Trainer. His enterprise included traveling 7-on-7 football teams, which cost \$360 plus travel and tournament fees, \$350-a-pop big man camps (linemenlivesmatter.com), and girls AAU basketball and softball squads where he charges \$35 [just to try out](#) and \$850 season dues.

His Freedom squads, which [relied heavily on transfer students](#) and were stocked with talent from his extracurricular businesses, were constructed in a way that had less in common with other public school football teams in the state than with travel teams and select squads in youth soccer, lacrosse or basketball.

And Freedom had been flat-out bullying public school opponents in Prince William County for years before Hayfield came calling. In [the 2022 season](#), Freedom scored 60 points or more in 10 games and 70 or more five times. Freedom was [up 91-0 at halftime](#) against Colgan High of Manassas, Va., on

the way to a [112-16 humiliation](#). Overton's Eagles won their 2022 state semifinal by 55 points, then routed James Madison in the championship, 48-14.

A Madison parent who attended the 2022 final against Freedom recalled, with some bitter giggles, the talent disparity between the squads and Overton's merciless playcalling.

"In the introductions before the game, they're naming every Freedom player and what college they're committed to," said the Madison parent, who requested anonymity because of how ugly the Hayfield situation has gotten. "I mean, our best guys go to D-III and theirs go to Clemson. So I'm hearing all the D-I schools they're going to and I'm thinking, *Well, we've got somebody going to Shenandoah College*. And I remember there's two minutes left and Freedom's up by like 30 points, and they're still throwing post patterns. Dude, you already won the state championship, and they deserved to win, but [Overton] wanted to humiliate us."

In 2023, Overton and Freedom put up another undefeated season, ending with a second state championship. During his years at Freedom, Overton was regularly accused by coaches and fans of other schools of illicit [recruiting tactics and having ineligible players](#), accusations he always denied. His team forfeited two wins in 2021 [for using ineligible players](#).

Hayfield has never won a state championship in football in its 56-year history. And whatever his rep for skirting rules and running up scores at Freedom, Overton won over a panel of Hayfield staffers and parents during interviews in January. "I've never done a hiring board, but I was incredibly impressed by Coach Overton," says Abe Kamarck, a hiring committee member who has two sons who played for Hayfield under Aziz and stayed on when Overton came. "Learning what he did at Freedom blew me away."

Kamarck said his biggest takeaway from the sessions with Overton was his talking about all the Freedom kids who went on to play in college—50 players in nine years, by Overton's count. Overton tells parents that kids who play for him get football scholarships; in July [he tweeted](#) about players now at the next level: "Having 10 former players on NCAA 25 from public school is crazy. This the difference between me and them FREE EDUCATION."

The Hayfield hiring committee gave a thumbs up to Thompson and Fritts to offer the job to Overton. The principal sweetened the deal by throwing in a job for Overton as a [security supervisor at the school](#). (According to a source with Fairfax County Schools, the guard job pays \$58,802.) Overton came aboard. And the mass exodus of coaches and players of the Freedom football team commenced.

Fritts declined an interview request when I met him in person at a Hayfield football game. Fritts also said at that time that all interviews with football or school personnel would have to be pre-approved through the "central office" of FCPS. I told him I'd been covering high school sports in and around the county for decades and had never heard of any such rule, let alone had it applied on game nights. "It's always been there," he said. "They're enforcing it now."

In response to subsequent requests to FCPS headquarters to interview Overton and Fritts, FCPS spokesperson Julie Allen said, "Neither of these staff members are participating in media interviews right now."

Allen said she would let me know if that no-interview policy changed. Allen later told me nobody from FCPS would talk to Defector about the Hayfield football team.

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Fritts announced Overton's hiring in early February 2024, the same week he disclosed on social media that [Hayfield got an apparel deal from Nike](#). When Overton showed up for work at Hayfield, the Freedom coaching staff came with him; an FCPS employee told me Thompson found a teacher's assistant job for Jeffrey Overton, the new coach's brother and the former Freedom defensive coordinator taking the same position at Hayfield. And over the last few months of the 2023-2024 school year, all the key underclassmen from Freedom's championship squads could be seen roaming the Hayfield hallways and throwing steel in the weightroom.

This was a ridiculously talented crop for a public school, with several D-I prospects showing up in time to participate in Overton's spring workouts. Among the transfers was an all-state receiver who'd already signed with Clemson, and a running back who last season was named the D.C. area's player of the year and took an offer from Virginia Tech. (Both of those Power Four commits, one of whom is Overton's nephew, are in the top 40 of [ESPN's latest ranking](#) of 2025 Virginia recruits, and are still listed as playing for Freedom.)

Recruiting for athletic purposes has always been expressly against the rules at Virginia public schools. The rulebook of the Virginia High School League, the Charlottesville-based non-profit that oversees scholastic sports in the state at all public schools as well as those private schools who request VHSL's blessing, says that its edicts are intended "to discourage recruiting and transfers for athletic/activity reasons." Most non-magnet public schools have geographic boundaries and students are generally compelled to attend the school in the district they live in. Hayfield is not a magnet school, so, going by the book, you either live in the surrounding neighborhoods or you go elsewhere.

The recruiting divide is the primary reason public and private schools don't compete against each other for local or state titles in Virginia. Hayfield had

only one private school opponent on its regular season schedule this year: Riverdale Baptist of Upper Marlboro, Md. That's a school with [its own history of athletic recruiting scandals](#). Unfortunately for Hayfield, Riverdale Baptist is still in the recruiting game. Its football team got a big influx of new players this offseason when another sports-centric private high school, Rock Creek Christian Academy (RCCA), went out of business. The RCCA football coach joined the Riverdale Baptist staff and brought key players with him. Riverdale Baptist scored early and often in bashing Hayfield, 55-30. However, Hayfield apparently treated this public-private matchup as an exhibition, and [did not count the Riverdale Baptist loss](#) on its record.

As during their days at Freedom, Overton and other transplanted coaches and players played up the heel persona at Hayfield. They appended the hashtag #hayfieldby40 to social media posts. "Hayfield vs Everybody" t-shirts appeared in team colors. As word of the burgeoning dream team spread around the Beltway, several more stellar athletes from nationally recognized private Catholic schools programs in the area enrolled in the Alexandria school. One was a quarterback from St. John's College High School in D.C.; a Hayfield source said before transferring to the Fairfax County school the player had an address in Fredericksburg, Va. Also a receiver and defensive back from DeMatha Catholic in Hyattsville, Md.; a source with ties to DeMatha football said the players lived in D.C. and Arlington, Va., respectively, prior to showing up at Hayfield. Social media posts indicate all three of those parochial players, like all the top Freedom players, patronized Overton's training businesses before getting to Hayfield.

In June, the situation at Hayfield was the subject of a story in a local newspaper, the [Fairfax County Times](#). The story itself, aggressively reported and written—it has an anonymous source calling what was happening at Hayfield "the biggest high school recruiting scandal in the history of our state"—adds another strange layer to this saga. The *FC Times* report, which broke the news about the student transfers to Hayfield, was co-bylined by

Sravan Gannavarapu and Asra Q. Nomani. They make for an odd pairing. Gannavarapu [is a young sports writer](#) whose previous clips can be found at websites like Fansided and NFL Spin Zone. Nomani, meanwhile, is a veteran investigative journalist and a former *Wall Street Journal* reporter who was hosting friend and WSJ colleague Daniel Pearl at her home in Karachi when he was kidnapped and murdered in 2002. She spent years [investigating his killing](#).

More recently, Nomani has worked as a right-wing political commentator and activist. She is the founder of a single-issue advocacy group called Coalition for TJ that sued Fairfax County over new admissions policies instituted at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, which is often hailed as [the best high school in the country](#). Nomani's group claimed that the new policies unfairly discriminated against Asian American students, and petitioned the Supreme Court. In February 2024, the [Court declined to hear the case](#). In 2023, Nomani published a book called *Woke Army: The Red-Green Alliance That Is Destroying America's Freedom*. That's not a typical résumé for a community newspaper high school football beat reporter.

The initial *FC Times* report from Gannavarapu and Nomani, odd as its conception and execution may have been, put Hayfield's football team into the spotlight, and the subsequent hubbub forced county schools superintendent [Michelle Reid](#) to get involved. In June, Reid announced she'd commissioned an investigation of what went down at Hayfield. But at [a town hall meeting in Alexandria](#) in late August to update constituents on the burgeoning controversy, Reid refuted all tales of improper transfers and fake addresses reported in the *FC Times*, saying every accusation was "found to be unsubstantiated." Reid, accompanied to the meeting by a lawyer, said the county's investigation determined that all the transfers "meet residency requirements" to attend Hayfield. She threw in that she had "full confidence" in Thompson, Fritts, and Overton, and that she supported everything they

were doing with the Hayfield football program. But Reid cut the town hall short as audience members began asking questions about how the investigation was conducted. Reid never released a report about how her investigation was conducted, or its findings.

Despite Reid's assertions at the meeting, one high-ranking county schools source said the county's investigation actually found nothing to refute the major allegations of misconduct, including transfers using fake addresses, groups of Freedom players taking daily commutes up and down I-95 for Overton's spring workouts, and the bullying of the incumbent Hayfield players by the incoming players and coaches. "It's all true," the source said.

Defector filed a FOIA request last month for documents related to the FCPS's investigation of Hayfield that Reid had cited while exonerating everybody involved. In response, FCPS claimed the state's public records law didn't cover the investigation and therefore the government agency would turn over nothing.

"The investigation was conducted by an external organization therefore there are not any FCPS created records responsive to your request," read an unsigned email from the FCPS FOIA office. "Fairfax County Public Schools is not the custodian of the records you seek and if a public record does not already exist, [state law] does not require an agency to create one."

FCPS later approved the transfers of at least two former Hayfield players whose families had complained about their treatment by Overton and the newcomers; those two played this season for other schools in the county. Last year's starting quarterback, now a junior at Hayfield, didn't even go out for the team this season. The player's father told Defector that Aziz told his son he would be "the face of the team" after last season, but the new coaching staff all but ignored the kid's existence. "He decided not to play when the transfers came in and he saw what was going on, what was going to happen," the father said.

Parents of the former Freedom players fought back after the reports about Hayfield's returning athletes being unhappy with the imports. In a [YouTube](#) interview posted June 24, 2024, three ex-Freedom parents defended Overton as a dedicated teacher, role model, and even father figure to the kids he coached at Freedom and trained at Playmakers Elite.

"They're proven winners," said Carleton Hughes, father of a Freedom/Hayfield defensive back. "Whether it was one transfer or 30, kids and parents could transfer and play for who they want to play for. That's it. You can't stop that. If you follow college sports, with the transfer portal, kids transfer all the time."

Dawn Braxton, who said in the video that she moved into Hayfield's district last spring after Overton told her he was leaving Freedom and her son said he wanted to follow him, had words of advice for pre-existing Hayfield football parents who weren't happy that their children could lose playing time to the imports. "Your kid's going to have to compete," she said.

"And if they're good there's nothing to worry about," added Freedom/Hayfield mother Chanel Jones-Robinson.

Given that transferring for athletic purposes is technically verboten in Virginia public schools, by saying all their kids ended up at Hayfield strictly to play football for the coach these parents only dug a deeper hole for Overton.

Overton has at least one supporter from the old guard at Hayfield: Abe Kamarck, who was on the hiring board that approved the new coach and remains sure that it was the right decision. His 12th-grader was an all-district linebacker last season, and according to the father that kid is now deciding whether to go to MIT or University of Chicago next year. Kamarck said he saw no problem with Overton's reliance on transfers at Freedom or Hayfield. He said any parent who wants his kid to change schools for

football, or even a group of parents wanting to transfer a group of kids for football, should be allowed to make the move.

"Everybody is concerned about their kids," Kamarck told me. "They want to have the best for them, like the chance to get a scholarship. Overton does that for these kids. Kids transfer for all sorts of different reasons: Athletics, for band, for drama, for academics. What's wrong with that? Yes, it's weird to have all the kids come to Hayfield. But what's wrong with having a good public school that's good at football?"

Kamarck said that during interviews with the hiring committee, Overton never discussed bringing any players with him from Freedom or Playmakers Elite. But, Kamarck has been enthralled with the results of the wholesale transplant of a championship team, so he accepts the methods.

"These kids are working so hard," he said. "All these kids want to do is play in the state championship. We need to stop tearing down, and start building. Coach Overton does amazing things. He's created a community and a family. He brings people up and helps them out. He's good for the kids. He's good for the school. Everybody is missing the good parts of this. This is more of a Ted Lasso story than it is a nefarious story."

Anybody who is opposed to what happened at Hayfield or even thinks what happened at the school can be stopped from happening again at other schools, Kamarck said, has a "pollyanna view of high school sports."

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I went to Hayfield's October 4 home game against Falls Church.

Hayfield was up 21-0 after only two offensive plays from scrimmage, having recovered a Falls Church fumble in the end zone for a score. By then another defensive TD for Hayfield had already been negated by penalty. State rules call for running the game clock nonstop once a team leads by 35 points, the

so-called mercy rule or slaughter rule. Overton kept his starters in with the running clock. And he showed a desire to humiliate the opposition: After Hayfield scored a touchdown on the first play of the second half to go up 48-0, Overton called for the Hawks to run a fake kick on the extra point. The fake, like everything Hayfield called, worked as it was drawn up, and the two-point conversion made the score an even 50-0. Falls Church's first-year coach, Tim Coogan, was an assistant coach at Hayfield last season. He responded to Overton's unsportsmanlike conversion call by doing everything possible, including taking delay of game penalties, to keep the scoring margin in double figures. The final score was 64-0. With the pitiful stall, Hayfield got only three plays on offense in the second half, and scored touchdowns on all three.

"This isn't even fun for the Hayfield kids," Jamie Steider, the parent of a Falls Church player, told me while she watched her son's team get destroyed.

"How do they even get skills if they never have any competition?" said Steider, who happens to be a Hayfield alum. "It's just disheartening to watch."

When it was over, I went on the field hoping to talk to Overton, and intending to ask about how much fun the game was for his players, since it was obvious by then the rest of Hayfield's season would be filled with similar slaughters. That's when Fritts said that on orders of FCPS, no interviews would be allowed.

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Mateo Dunne, an elected member of the Fairfax County School Board, proposed the county fund an independent investigation after Reid's declaration that FCPS found nothing that happened at Hayfield was wrong. Dunne said the superintendent needlessly "put her own credibility at risk" by going public with her vote of confidence for Overton and Thompson, while not disclosing what she learned from the investigation that led her to that

conclusion. Dunne said that handing Overton a job supervising security at the school showed that the Hayfield principal's focus on football trumped other more serious concerns. "Unfortunately, with school shootings being what they are, you want somebody qualified," he said. "What training does he have?"

Dunne was particularly troubled by the lack of information about all the transfers. Dunne said he couldn't understand how Reid would look at the large number of families saying they'd relocated from Woodbridge to Hayfield's district after Overton's hiring—he said at the time the board had been told that 15 families made the move—and not see that as evidence of improper recruiting. Dunne said he shared his concerns in a meeting with Reid after what he regarded as her unsatisfying town hall appearance.

"The superintendent's background is in engineering, she's a math person," Dunne said. "So I said to her, 'You do understand that the odds that 15 students left Freedom, and they all just happened to be football players, and they all just happened to end up in the same neighborhood, is the same likelihood statistically as you being struck by lightning while you're being attacked by a bear?'"

The superintendent wasn't moved to do anything by Dunne's analogy. So Dunne asked the board for an independent investigation. On August 29, opening day for Hayfield's 2024 football season, Dunne's proposal was put to a vote. The board [shot it down, 9-3](#).

"Most of my colleagues just want to move on," Dunne told me in September. "I don't think we're in a place to move on."

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Football folks outside Fairfax County weren't so ready to move on, either. At the end of October, as Hayfield was slaughtering one National District

opponent after another, Defector received a copy of a memo signed by Virginia High School League director Billy Haun and sent to its leadership throughout the state. In it, Haun told the group that after its own investigation, VHSL had decided to ban Hayfield's football team from postseason appearances for two years, starting this week. A spokesman for the VHSL told Defector that the organization had begun looking into complaints about recruiting by Overton and Hayfield even before the FCPS concluded its investigation and Reid said everything was above board. A letter detailing the infractions and punishment was drafted by VHSL officials on or around October 21, according to the spokesman, then sent to Hayfield administrators via both regular mail and email days later.

Defector filed FOIA requests with FCPS for the suspension letter VHSL sent to Hayfield.

"Records responsive to your request for a VHSL letter are entirely withheld because their release is prohibited by law, and/or Fairfax County Public Schools is exercising its discretion to withhold the records in its entirety under VFOIA," wrote Elizabeth Donaldson, a records officer for the county, in a November 12 email.

A Hayfield source provided Defector with a copy of a letter that VHSL's Haun sent out to members regarding the Hayfield investigation. The missive showed that VHSL officials ruled the school violated the state's "proselytizing rule," which is a blatantly vague anti-recruiting decree forbidding coaches or administrators from "encouraging" any student "to transfer from one school to another" for sports. Haun also wrote that VHSL investigators determined that 24 students had transferred to Hayfield specifically to play football, including 14 Freedom players. Those are bigger numbers than what FCPS and Reid were admitting to over the summer.

Haun's memo said that the mass migration had "disadvantaged" Freedom athletes by crippling the Woodbridge school's football program. (Freedom's

director of student activities, Thomas Annunziata, did not respond to Defector's request for an interview.) VHSL also asserted that because of the talent imbalance brought about by the Thompson-Fritts-Overton shenanigans, all teams "who will compete against Hayfield this school year have been disadvantaged."

As penance for proselytizing and creating competitive disadvantages, VHSL ruled, Hayfield "may play a regular season schedule but may not participate in any play-off toward a district, regional, or state championship during those seasons." Hayfield appealed the suspension.

On the night of October 30, just as word that VHSL had dropped the hammer began spreading throughout the D.C.-area schoolboy football community, Hayfield took to its home field to face another district team, Justice High School of Falls Church. The pending punishment didn't make Overton a more gracious host. The game wasn't as close as the final score, 69-0.

After additional hearings, VHSL ruled that the punishment had been upheld, and all Hayfield's appeals were exhausted.

Neither principal Thompson, athletic director Fritts, coach Overton, nor FCPS superintendent Reid made any public comments after VHSL hammered the school. On November 8, the day that news of VHSL's final suspension decree came out, FCPS and Hayfield [issued a joint unsigned statement](#) saying that VHSL had previously approved every transfer to Hayfield, and that the football team only used players that had already been deemed eligible by VHSL.

That night, Hayfield faced John Lewis High School, a historically weak football school, in the last scheduled game of the regular season. The [Washington Post's Michael Errigo](#) reported before kickoff that FCPS was "not credentialing any media" to cover the Hayfield game. With no playoffs to look forward to, Overton took out his woes on one last overmatched foe.

Hayfield was up 42-0 with about a minute left in the first quarter.

The mercy rule kicked in, as it has in all Hayfield's games against public schools this season, but Overton remained focused on the slaughter. He left starters in even with the lopsided score and running clock. Hayfield's offense had but five plays in the second half, and scored touchdowns on three of them. The third score came with about seven minutes left, and made it 63-0. Lewis High coach Larry Choates had his team take one snap, then had his players stand around doing nothing but take delay of game penalties to run out the clock. So the Hayfield players spent more than half of the last quarter of what they were told was their last game also standing around doing nothing.

After watching the Lewis coach take those drastic steps just so Overton couldn't run up the score any more, I called Choates to ask whether he considered not playing the game at all.

"I'm not at liberty to discuss the situation," he told me.

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After VHSL's suspension ruling, two parents of Hayfield football players filed separate lawsuits in Fairfax County Circuit Court.

The first suit accused VHSL of defamation, with a father saying his son "suffered reputational harm" because suspending Hayfield could lead classmates and college recruiters to believe his son was "ineligible" and had broken rules. The father asked the court to award him "[c]ompensatory damages in the amount of \$1,000,000." The second suit, filed by a football mother on behalf of "Parents of Hayfield Secondary School Football Team," pleaded with the court to prevent the state championship tournament from being held without the Hawks. Her petition said if Hayfield is kept out of the playoffs, that would cause "immediate, substantial, and irreparable harm on

the student-athletes' college recruitment potential and lifelong opportunities." And the plaintiff argued that parents' case would win at trial because they could prove that "VHSL conducted a flawed and reckless investigation based on unverified claims by external parties."

The suits did not immediately make waves. An FCPS employee told me he thought everybody had moved on after the VHSL said all appeals had been exhausted, and that the parental litigation wasn't being taken seriously. "They don't even have lawyers," he said.

But on November 15, the same day that the Virginia playoffs were scheduled to start around the state, the [FC Times](#) reported that the Hayfield parents' cases had been combined, and an emergency hearing on an injunction request was scheduled for Fairfax County Circuit Court that afternoon. Adding gravitas to the tale, the formerly pro se plaintiffs had suddenly obtained a powerhouse lawyer, John Cafferky, a guy known for fighting court battles on behalf of FCPS and other public school systems in the state. Cafferky did not respond to Defector's interview request. Micah Schwartz, a Charlottesville, Va., attorney representing VHSL in the litigation, declined to comment.

The emergency hearing on the injunction request in Fairfax County Circuit Court began at 2:00 p.m., or five hours before kickoff of the playoffs all around the state. A coach whose team qualified for the postseason texted me while the proceedings were still going on to say he and all his players were waiting around for the verdict. FCPS told him earlier in the day that if Hayfield got an injunction, his team would not play that night. The coach was not happy.

"Crazy I'm sitting here with 60 kids who don't know if they go home today or play a game because one cheat has been allowed to do what he does," the coach wrote.

Hayfield got its injunction. Judge Manuel A. Capsalis granted the Hail Mary request just before 4:00 p.m., or about three hours before kickoff. He set a trial date for the suit for Dec. 4. According to the Fairfax County courts clerk's office, no filing from Judge Capsalis or other paperwork explaining his ruling in the Hayfield case had been registered by the time this story was published.

Overton thanked supporters outside the courtroom after the surprise ruling. Several parents yelled at Nomani, who was in the crowd recording the celebration. Fritts stood in the background. One [adult appeared to take a swing at Nomani](#), likely trying to grab the reporter's phone or knock it out of her hands to stop the filming. She continued filming.

All four playoff games in Northern Virginia Region C were postponed just three hours before their scheduled kickoff. VHSL quickly reworked the brackets and inserted Hayfield as the No. 1 seed in the region and announced a new playoff schedule that night. Robinson Secondary School, which made the postseason via the Hayfield ban despite a 3-7 record this year, was booted out.

First-round games in the state tournament for Hayfield and all Region C teams were pushed back six days, to November 21. The rest of the state went forward with their opening playoff games last Friday as scheduled. So teams in Hayfield's region have to play catch-up. Second-round games will be played November 26, and the regional final will be held on November 30. That means the teams that advance to the regional final will have to play [three games in nine days](#). Assuming, that is, that there are no more dramatic plot twists to the Hayfield soap opera.

Over the weekend, one playoff-bound coach told me officials and coaches from Northern Virginia schools were discussing a boycott of the postseason. Following the gathering, [six coaches sent a letter to Reid](#) saying that overriding the VHSL suspension and letting Hayfield play "creates a system

where rules can be bent, broken, or overlooked without meaningful consequences." The letter, which was signed by all but one of the opposing coaches in Hayfield's playoff bracket, said a boycotting decision would be made later in the week.

Another former coach told me he was working with VHSL on an emergency injunction to get Hayfield out of the playoffs by lifting the previous emergency injunction that put Hayfield in.

Judge Capsalis's next hearing on the Hayfield parents' lawsuit against the VHSL is scheduled for December 4. That's three days before the semifinals, which Hayfield will play in barring a major upset on the field or an unfavorable verdict in court.

The night before Hayfield got its injunction, the Fairfax County school board voted to extend Reid's contract as superintendent by four more years and give her a big raise, to over [\\$424,000 a year, plus a \\$12,000 annual car allowance](#). The board cited what Reid [has done for sports](#) in the county schools while announcing the new deal.

Hayfield is now set to open the quest for Overton's third-straight state championship against Edison High, another Alexandria school. The teams have already played once this season. Hayfield won, 70-6. Edison's coach was among those who signed the boycott letter. Overton knows this. Take the over.

Recommended

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