

From the Bench: State ADs Plead Case During State Legislative Intern Meeting on Idiocy of Transfer Portal

It will be on Feb. 12 of this year that the 87th session of the West Legislature will get underway. Since the Legislature deals with policy making for the state to address the many challenges the state faces, you may be wondering why a sports blog would be talking about it.

Simple: The West Virginia Legislature has a real issue with keeping its nose out of high school sports. Most lawmakers arrive in Charleston featuring a unique professional skill set that allows them to make informed decisions. It is clear the chamber is either extremely low or completely void of those who understand prep sports.



Proof is there. Just rewind to the West Virginia Legislature's Golden Goose of idiocy from 2023 and you will find it in the form of House Bill 2820. You know it better as the bill that created the West Virginia High School Transfer Portal.

The good news for the West Virginia Legislature is even though they created the mess, they don't have to worry about it. The WVSSAC gets blamed for it and has to deal with every single concern coming into their Parkersburg office. You can point your finger at them for some things in prep sports, but this one – and it is the jock-strapped elephant in the prep sports room – is the biggest.

Despite objections from principals, athletic directors, coaches, and anyone who is not locked into the all-too-frequent fantasy land of every kid is going to get a Division I scholarship, HB2820 passed after it was initially introduced as a Senate bill. Essentially, anyone intimately involved with prep sports and with the correct intentions knew it was wrong.

The West Virginia Legislature told the folks that know what is going on that they don't know. As we all knew, it turned out to be a case where the Legislature proved its sometimes best to leave things alone or, at worst, take the advice of those who do in fact know better.

I wrote about it in a blog after HB2820 passed on March 26, 2023. The headline summed up my thoughts on the bill – it stinks. Nearly two years later I still have some thoughts on the bill – it stinks.

Without getting into all the details, the bill is this: Student-athletes are allowed to transfer to any school at least one time and keep their athletic eligibility. In other words, if you can find transportation to

another school that is not your public school, you can go there.

Legislators told us it was about fairness. It would increase visibility. It would open the door to scholarships.

As for fairness, it sure has worked for those loaded teams. I mean, it certainly is fair for a kid to get to their senior year of high school, max his athletic abilities out, and watch five or six potentially recruited athletes come in and take their spot (please note this is sarcasm).

For those arguing my point by saying, "life is not fair." I agree. So, if you are in a school district where you do not like the sports teams or



you think the coach is giving you the cold shoulder, just deal with it because, well, as those who do not see the above scenario as an issue,

just stay put because life is not fair.

Doors have definitely opened. You now have teams either stacked with transfers or ravaged due to the loss of transfers. Visibility has increased in scores so lopsided in games that should be close that it makes statewide news. And the scholarships are there, essentially the same amount as it has always been because if you are good enough to play, coaches will find you.

The real door that opened was for those ravaged by the need to win in a game played by teenagers. It opened the door for illegal recruiting of players (yes, it is illegal to recruit even with the portal) that I have seen multiple times on screen shots, and everyone involved knows is taking place with nothing really able to be done.

The good news? It can all be reversed. The bad news? That would take someone is admitting they got it wrong. Can anyone recall the last time an elected official in Charleston said, "my bad."

A seed to reverse this was planted this week – Tuesday, Jan. 7. Athletic directors from across West Virginia spoke in front of the Joint Standing Committee on Education at the West Virginia Capitol. It happened as part of the interim legislative meetings taking place in Charleston.

According to a report by MetroNews, David Viands, the AD of Jefferson High School who heads up the state's athletic director's association, released the numbers of transfers from 2023 and 2024.

Viands said in there were 432 transfers for fall sports – that's just fall sport – in 2023. In 2024, it was almost the same at 433. Again, understand that is just the fall sports total.

In the same report, Viands pointed out students are transferring to the top teams. Stunning huh?

"We're seeing transfers and juniors and seniors basically to go join a better team or to win a state championship," Viands said in the MetroNews report.

"That sounds great for the schools accepting the student athletes, but it does create disparity in schools that if you lose a lot of seniors and a lot of juniors, you're now playing freshmen and sophomores and you're playing against the school that these student athletes went to."

Another AD told those in the committee meeting he knows 80 athletic directors across the state. Of the group, zero like the rule.

In fairness, not everyone in the Legislature is a fan. Back in my 2023 blog, I quoted Kanawha County Republican Delegate Dana Ferrell's description of the bill after he voted against it.

"This is a travesty," said Farrell. "We have unleashed a beast."

Why would his opinion matter despite the fact a beast was released? It is simple. Ferrell is a former high school coach who understood what was at stake. Recruiting, which is still rampant today, was predicted by Farrell in this quote from 2023 who easily saw what his colleagues either should have seen or refused to.

"Before ink was even dry on that bill Saturday evening (on the last day of the 2023 session), I had screenshots of coaches that were poaching other schools," said Farrell, who said the shots he received came when the bill was being passed through the legislative chambers. "... I have documentation of coaches reaching out to parents of other schools to

try to make that connection to woo that kid over."

In the same blog I wrote in 2023, former WVSSAC Director Bernie Dolan said the same. He saw it too. He, and everyone there, were adamantly against it. They, too, were summarily brushed off. The legislature knew more than those knee deep in it every single day.



Here is what the Legislature really needs to know. It stunk then. It stinks now.

And it will stink even worse if legislation is re-introduced to allow high school athletes to play travel ball at the same time as their high school games and allow high school coaches to coach travel teams. The idiotic

legislation, the ultimate “hold my beer” after thinking nothing could rival the transfer portal stupidity, would require at least a dozen hands for the appropriate face palm needed at the stupidity of it.

Come February, it can be fixed. Or as one of the ADs suggest, perhaps finding some common ground (translation – something not so ridiculous).

I am not totally abandoning ship. In the video of the interim meeting (Click [HERE](#)), Delegate Wayne Clark (R-Jefferson) voices his concerns and talks about the substantial number of students transferring from Musselman High School. He questioned it.

"We're seeing exactly what we thought we were going to see with this transfer portal in place," he said. "I strongly suggest we look at that this session."

The conversation was cordial. The committee appeared interested.

Still, odds are strong that it will be left alone even with folks like Farrell, Clark, and a handful of others. Odds are better there will be more legislative stupidity passed before the session is over.

I will promise you this. If I am wrong, I will be the first to say, “my bad.”

Editor's Note: Top photo, by Will Price of West Virginia Legislative Photography, shows Jefferson High Athletic Director David Viands addressing the committee. Second image is the WVSSAC logo, while the bottom image is a screen shot to Wayne Clark, R-Jefferson, talking to members of the Athletic Director's Association.