

# GREATER NEW ORLEANS FOOTBALL OFFICIALS ASSOCIATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On Friday, October 11, 2013, during the third quarter of the St. Paul's - Mandeville football game, two game officials, who are members of the Greater New Orleans Football Officials Association (GNOFOA) were arrested by the Covington Police Department.

This disappointing incident marred what was by all accounts a well-played football game between two district rivals, and it unnecessarily took attention away from the hard work and effort of the players of each team.

It has unnecessarily called into question the reputations and integrity of two officials who were assigned to work the game. James Radcliffe and Chris Gambino are each experienced officials who have officiated high school football in this area for several years. Each has officiated a state championship game, and each currently officiates at the collegiate level in different sports.

It also puts undue negative attention on officiating in general, and particularly officiating in GNOFOA. As a general rule, officials do not seek out publicity. Instead, they avoid it. They operate quietly and become involved in the game only when necessary to enforce the rules. It is their goal to be as invisible as possible so that the game and the teams are the only focus.

As officials, we are charged with maintaining the integrity of the game. It is our obligation to see that the game is played fairly and within the rules with safety as a core concern. To do that, our guidance comes from the Louisiana High School Athletic

Association (LHSAA) rules, as well as the football playing rules of the National Federation of High Schools. Officials assume authority for the contest, not simply the field of play, 30 minutes prior to the scheduled game time. The rules cover not only the players, but persons not subject to the rules who hinder play by unfair acts.

Additionally, LHSAA Rule 6.26 prohibits unauthorized personnel from being on a team's sideline or team area during any contest at any level of play. While there may be many reasons for this rule, from an officiating standpoint, this rule allows officials to manage and officiate the game and helps to ensure the safety of players and others.

To accomplish this, officials rely on game administration, which is normally the home team, for assistance in game-related matters. LHSAA Rule 3.1.3 states that the home team is responsible for the overall management of the contest, which includes taking safety precautions, providing security, and the security and well-being of officials from the time they arrive until the time they leave. It is precisely because the home team provides security as part of its duties that officials may seek out assistance from that security in certain matters.

Considering that background, here is what happened as we understand it.

During the game, with 6:52 remaining in the third quarter, while the Mandeville offense was playing third down and goal to go at St. Paul's 13-yard line, members of the chain crew told Head Linesman Chris Gambino that they were having a problem with fans in the sideline area. During a stoppage in play, Gambino sought assistance from a Covington Police Department officer in moving these individuals back away from the sideline area. Other members of the crew saw various individuals in this area as well. The officer did not do so and instead told Gambino to go back and worry about the field. The officer also threatened to arrest Gambino if he said one more word. After multiple requests to the officer, Gambino returned to the field.

Gambino spoke with Referee James Radcliffe, who walked over to talk with the officer. When Radcliffe stepped beyond the sideline, the officer, who was on the field turf in front of the track, pointed at Radcliffe and walked toward him. A few seconds later, the officer reached behind his back and produced hand cuffs. Radcliffe told the officer that he needed the people back, and the officer did not move them. The officer then told Radcliffe to go back and worry about the field. Radcliffe then told the officer that he needed to leave as well, and that he would go talk with home management. As Radcliffe was beginning to do that, the officer called him back and placed him under arrest. Afterwards, Gambino, who was asking another officer who the ranking officer was, was also placed under arrest. At no time did either official hit, push, strike, threaten, intimidate, or curse at the officer. Nonetheless, they were brought to the Covington Police Department Office and later transferred to St. Tammany Parish Prison, where they were booked on charges of Public Intimidation and released on a \$30 bond sometime around 5:00 a.m. on Saturday morning.

Following the arrest, and after approximately 20 minutes, the remaining five on-field officials and assigned clock operators finished working the game. We commend these

officials for staying and finishing the game following this bizarre situation. In doing so, they never lost sight of the most important things that night -- the game, the two teams, and the young men who played on them.

In seeking assistance from security to move back individuals from the sideline area, the officiating crew did exactly what it was supposed to do. The fact that the individuals were not on the field but near the track does not change the officials' need for assistance. Officials are responsible for the playing contest, not simply what occurs in the field of play. The presence of unauthorized individuals near the sideline in violation of LHSAA rules, even though off the field, presents a safety issue to players, officials, and those individuals themselves. Such individuals may get in the way of both officials as well as the authorized chain crew and ball personnel. When allowed to continue, it has the potential of creating a hostile and intimidating atmosphere by persons not subject to the playing rules. When this occurs, and in the absence of assistance, officials are forced to turn their attention to matters occurring off the field in order to make sure that they, the chain crew, and any ball personnel are able to work, as well as to make sure that players are not endangered when they run out of bounds. When officials have to do this, they are unable to focus their attention on the 22 players competing on the field of play. As a result, they are unable to perform their basic duties - ensure the game is played in a fair and safe manner, and maintain the integrity of the game. This is why officiating crews need assistance from security and game administration with the keeping the sideline area clear of unauthorized individuals, especially near the goal line.

With this in mind, in light of the LHSAA handbook and the football playing rules, this officiating crew did exactly what it was expected to do in addressing the sideline area. The officials acted appropriately when they felt a problem was brewing as a result of unknown individuals being in the sideline area near the goal line. They sought out assistance from game security in addressing the matter before it became a bigger problem. They did not get that assistance.

No matter what level of play, whether a little league game at a playground, or a professional event, officials should be able to seek assistance from security in addressing unauthorized personnel in sideline area. We cannot understand why this request to the officer was not honored, and further cannot understand how this situation eventually led to the arrest of these two officials who sought assistance in order to do their jobs.

Despite this incident, our officiating crews have always enjoyed a good relationship with law enforcement officers from several different jurisdictions, whether in our immediate service area or around the state during the playoff season. They routinely assist our crews, provide security, escort us to and from the field, and address any concerns we may have. We are grateful and appreciative for all the help they regularly give us and the community in general.

The Greater New Orleans Football Officials Association provides officials for several high schools, middle schools, and recreation programs. Its members come from all walks of life and include educators, firefighters, police officers, dentists, accountants, healthcare

professionals, salespeople, engineers, students, IT professionals, business owners, and others. Its near-160 members strive to provide the highest levels of professionalism and quality officiating to football programs throughout our service area as well as the entire state. Many of its current and past members have and do officiate collegiately at the Division I and II levels.

This incident in no way affects this association's mission. We will continue to focus on providing the highest quality officiating for all teams and in all games we officiate. This is what each school, team, player, and fan has a right to expect. We will continue to train, improve, and perform at a high level in order to do what we are supposed to do - maintain the integrity of the game for all of those that are part of it.

Please address any questions to either GNOFOA President Eddie Allemore at (985) 773-2928 or Assignment Secretary Kevin Boitmann at (504) 717-0596.