



June 5, 2017

COMMUNICATION REGARDING DISQUALIFICATION OF GRAND FORKS SOCCER TEAM FROM 'A' GIRLS SOCCER PROVINCIALS.

There has been a lot of feedback and inquiry from both inside and outside of the school sports community in response to the Post Media (The Province, Vancouver Sun) article published in print on June 1, 2017 regarding the disqualification of the Grand Forks 'A' Soccer Team from the 2017 BC School Sports Provincial Championships.

The Board of Directors suggested that in the interests of both organizational transparency and member school education that we publish this document to communicate the entirety of the factors at play, the process that was followed and the eventual outcome. The purpose of this is not to prosecute any one school, but due to the public nature of its outcome, the Board felt it appropriate to use this as an opportunity to educate and communicate with our member schools.

How did BCSS become aware of the issue?

With any new student entered into the Student-Athlete Registration System (STARS), Grade 8, or otherwise, BCSS staff verify the student in the system to reduce any duplicates or conflicts. In this case, Grand Forks Secondary School added two student-athletes into STARS, and upon review, it was discovered they were in Grade 7. BCSS Staff then called the school, and they confirmed that the student-athletes were in Grade 7 and not enrolled at Grand Forks Secondary School.

Why were the student-athletes declared ineligible?

The student athletes were registered in Grade 7, and therefore were subject to the Grade 7 eligibility rules (Section III D3.5). Particularly subsection D3.5.1 a) and b) which read:

- a) *Grade seven (7) student-athletes must be registered at the school applying for the exemption;*
- b) *Grade seven (7) student-athletes can only participate on a grade eight (8) or bantam team sport*

In this situation, the student-athletes were registered at Christina Lake Elementary School, and were competing on the Grand Forks Sr. Girls Soccer team. Failing to meet both of those criteria, they were deemed ineligible.

Was there any other penalty available to BCSS to use?

There are two different areas when looking at athlete eligibility. There are "registration infractions," where a player is not registered, but is otherwise eligible. In these cases, a fine is assessed for the late registration, but no other penalty is assessed as per BCSS Policy relative to outcome of matches or games.

There are also cases with an "eligibility infraction," which is where a member school has used an athlete who is ineligible for competition for reasons other than a late registration. That is where the stricter penalties come into play.

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Section III C5.1 and C5.2 explain the penalties in this situation, specifically 5.1.2 and 5.2.2 a) and b) which read:

- a) Forfeiture of all restricted interschool competition in which the ineligible student-athlete has participated*
- b) A \$50 fine per instance to a maximum of \$200*

In this case, Grand Forks had used the Grade 7 student-athletes for the majority of the season, and confirmed that the players did play throughout the zone qualifying tournament.

There is no spectrum or alternate options available to the Executive Director when imposing the penalty according to this policy. As such, the wins of the Grand Forks Soccer team were deemed forfeited, and they were assessed a \$200 fine. As a result, they also no longer qualified for the BC School Sports 'A' Soccer Provincial Championships.

Did they appeal? What did the Board do?

As per the policies of BCSS, the only part of the penalty that can be appealed is the monetary fine; the forfeitures are not appealable. The Board of Directors did accept documentation from the school, to review the circumstances for reconsideration as a way to ensure the policies were being applied consistently and fairly.

There were lengthy discussions regarding both the contents of the documents from the school relative to the circumstances, as well as the ability for the Board to act independently of policy.

The Board considered the following in its discussions:

- This was a mistake made by adults, and the Board was acutely and agonizingly aware that the consequences would have direct impact on student-athletes, who themselves had done nothing wrong.
- Grand Forks Secondary School had twenty-five (25) student-athletes registered to its senior girls soccer roster in STARS.
- The school stated that injuries and players quitting necessitated the use of grade seven student-athletes.
- According to the 'A' Soccer Zone Rep, Grand Forks had fourteen (14) players in attendance, including the two (2) grade seven student athletes, at the Zone tournament. This means they would have had twelve (12) players without the grade seven athletes. It was recognized that while twelve (12) is not ideal, it was certainly a sufficient number to compete with.
- Letters of support were received from the competing coaches in that zone supporting Grand Forks attending the Provincial Championship despite the infraction, a great show of sportsmanship, which should be recognized.
- The school did not at any point submit a Grade Seven (7) Eligibility Application, or inquire for guidance as to the use of possible grade sevens to the BCSS office. Had a Grade Seven (7) Eligibility Application been submitted, this would have been caught by the Eligibility Officer.

- The school only tried to enter the Grade 7 student-athletes into STARS after the zone tournament, where they qualified for Provincials. Had they not qualified, BCSS would likely have not been aware of their use at all.
- The school also communicated that they do not have a grade eight (8) team in girls soccer, and therefore the only team they had was the senior team. As a rural school, they argued they should have the ability to add Grade 7 athletes to other rosters.
- The school has 174 females enrolled in Grades 8-12 this year, including 66 seniors in Grades 11 and 12.
- There was a second Girls Soccer team from another zone that had qualified for BCSS Provincials, but had done so using an ineligible player and self-reported. As per the rules, their championship qualification was nullified as a result. The effect of allowing one school to participate and not the other, under similar circumstances, was also discussed.
- The school is responsible for ensuring they are compliant with the rules of the organization, and being unaware of a rule is not an excuse or reason for an exemption.

Furthermore, the Board examined if it has any capacity to act in this case. While most organizations have written permissions for the board to act in certain situations, BC School Sports does not. Therefore, the ability for them to intervene is quite limited. Based on precedent and necessity, the only time the Board will act without membership vote is in a case:

- i. To rule on a situation that is not covered in the Bylaws and Policies of the organization.
- ii. To provide clarity to staff and members where a policy may be conflicting against another policy, or the application or intent of a policy is ambiguous or unclear.
- iii. Where the application of a policy would provide direct threat to the organization, either by not following the applicable laws of British Columbia or exposing the organization to litigation.

This situation was clearly explained by the policies and there was no question to the intended application. Combined with the factors relevant to the situation as noted above, the Board, respecting the policies of the membership, left the ruling unaltered as assessed by the Executive Director.

How often does this happen?

Thankfully, this isn't a common occurrence. This is the fourth (4th) incident of a team being assessed a forfeiture penalty for use of an ineligible player in the 2016-17 season, and when you consider that there are approximately 7,600 teams and 88,000 student-athletes in BCSS, it is an extremely low number. It would be naïve to suggest that there were only four (4) instances of participating with ineligible players across the province, as there may be some that we don't catch or aren't made aware of, but even so, it is not believed to be a pervasive problem.

Should you have further questions, don't hesitate to contact the BCSS Office.