

Verdict in Linn-Mar case could be soon

Written by Jim Ecker

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There was growing speculation Wednesday that a verdict in the Linn-Mar football investigation could be announced soon, perhaps as early as Thursday now that the school year has ended.

Linn-Mar superintendent Quintin Shepherd, Linn-Mar principal Jeff Gustason and Linn-Mar football coach Bob Forsyth could not be reached for comment this week and Linn-Mar athletic director Scott Mahmens said Wednesday he has no information on the situation.

Linn-Mar families have charged assistant football coach Matt Casebolt and Forsyth with verbal abuse, taunting, bullying and harassment of their sons and have accused Casebolt of physical abuse as well. In addition, the families have accused Forsyth, Mahmens and Gustason of not taking effective action to stop the abuse.

The Linn-Mar school district conducted an in-house investigation this winter and dismissed all charges in February due to insufficient evidence, but the families felt the investigation was tainted because Gustason and Mahmens were allowed to lead the investigation even though they were accused of being part of the problem.

The families then filed their complaints with the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners, which launched its own investigation in March.

The situation has been a hot topic of conversation in recent days at Linn-Mar graduation parties and other activities, with mounting speculation that a resolution would be revealed shortly.

"From what I understand, tomorrow is the final resolution," Mark Henrichs, the spokesman for the families, said Wednesday. "Nobody knows what the resolution is going to be."

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"I've heard different stories that there's three coaches that will no longer be coaching, I've heard that the three people aren't just coaches and that it's two coaches and Gustason. I've heard Forsyth will retain his teaching position, I've heard that he's not retaining his teaching position. So it's kind of all over the place."

Henrichs said he has not spoken recently to any Linn-Mar administrators, teachers or coaches about the investigation. All of his information is based on conversations with other Linn-Mar families.

"It's all from somebody who has talked to somebody, but nobody wants to give up their source," he said.

The Linn-Mar school district has the authority to fire employees based on cause. The BoEE can strip coaches, teachers and administrators of their licenses and effectively interrupt or end their careers.

It is not clear if the Linn-Mar school district has overseen a second investigation of the charges, or whether the BoEE has been conducting the only ongoing probe. That was one of the questions the Metro Sports Report wanted to ask Shepherd and Gustason, but neither administrator has made himself available.

The Metro Sports Report has a meeting scheduled with Shepherd on Friday morning in his office, but he has not responded to three voice-messages and one e-mail message in the past few weeks.

Bob Jordan, another spokesman for the families, has supplied the BoEE with information but has not heard anything from the state board in recent days. Like Henrichs, he's been talking to other Linn-Mar families and waiting for official information.

"We're all talking around, trying to find out who knows what, but nothing has come up," Jordan

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said Wednesday. "Everybody just knows that something is dropping. There are a lot of theories of who it's going to be and what it's going to be."

Based on those conversations, Jordan remarked that "Everybody knows Casebolt is going to be fired."

Casebolt has been accused of taunting football players who also participated in show choir by calling them "show queers" and questioning their commitment to football. He's also been accused of shoving a 45-pound circular weight into one player's face (Bob Jordan's son) and instructing another player to pick up broken glass with his bare hands following an accident in the weight room.

The Metro Sports Report broke the news in March that Mahmens has decided to take early retirement and will be leaving the Linn-Mar school district at the end of this month.

Five families filed the original complaints with the Linn-Mar school district and had their complaints dismissed. The same five families took their complaints to the BoEE, but since then many other families have joined the process and Jordan has sent their information to the BoEE as well, with the number of families climbing to approximately 30.