

## Parents complain to L-M school board

Written by Jim Ecker

Monday, 22 February 2016 19:27 - Last Updated Monday, 22 February 2016 20:13

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The Linn-Mar parents who are unhappy with the school's football program took their complaints to the Linn-Mar school board Monday evening during an emotional session at the LRC Boardroom in Marion.

The parents have accused Linn-Mar football coaches with physical, verbal, mental and emotional abuse by taunting, harassing and injuring their sons during formal school activities. Most of the complaints have been filed against assistant coach Matt Casebolt and head coach Bob Forsyth.

The parents originally filed their complaints with the Linn-Mar school district, but all of their complaints have been dismissed by the district due to "insufficient evidence" following an in-house investigation.

The families are in the process of filing a formal complaint with the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners. And although they have previously complained to school board president Tim Isenberg about the alleged abuses, they wanted to speak before the full school board and air their complaints publicly Monday.

The board meeting drew a large crowd, with dozens of people - including a contingent of Linn-Mar football players - standing in the back of the room in support of the football coaches and program. Many of those players made public comments during the meeting, but the most dramatic moments came when several of the unhappy parents used their allotted three minutes to address the board.

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Michelle Jones, whose son Caymen was allegedly called a "show queer" because he participated in football and show choir five years ago, was moved to tears during her remarks. She said her son suffered from depression due to the taunting he received and had to be hospitalized for treatment.

"The verbal abuse, the physical abuse, has to stop," she pleaded. "It's been going on for five years. When is it going to be enough?"

"All we ask is a voice, to make it stop," she said.

Bob Jordan, whose son Jeremy was allegedly hit in the face with a circular 45-pound weight when Casebolt slapped the weight into him with both hands, brought a 35-pound circular weight with him to the board meeting and slammed it on a table to demonstrate the damage that could be done by such an object.

"Coach was mad because he wasn't doing it right," Jordan told board members and the crowd. "He hit it with both hands, into his mouth, breaking his tooth, cutting his lip."

Bob Jordan also brought a box filled with broken glass to the meeting because of the experience another football player allegedly had with Casebolt in the weight room. The player accidentally broke a mirror in the weight room, and Casebolt told the player to clean it up, offering no assistance or proper equipment. The player allegedly cut his hand when he tried to pick up the glass with bare hands.

"I'll be happy to dump this out if any of you want to pick this up with your bare hands," Bob Jordan told the board members.

The unhappy Linn-Mar families - along with all the players and parents who spoke in favor of the football program and coaches - made their remarks during the "Audience Communications" part of the school board meeting. They were not specifically on the agenda, so school board members did not offer comments of their own, citing school board policy.

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Current and former players - and several of their parents - spoke in glowing terms of the football program and coaches, saying how much the coaches have helped them as students and athletes.

The members for the "Concerned Parent Group," as they've called themselves, acknowledged that many players have enjoyed a positive experience in the program, but said they are concerned about the players (including their own sons) who allegedly have been taunted, bullied, harassed and injured.

"What is the Linn-Mar school district doing to protect our children?," asked Mark Henrichs, the spokesman for the group.

So far, the Concerned Parents Group say have not gotten any answers.