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High school boys' golf: West Jessamine swinging for repeat at State

KHSAA advises schools to stop organized post-game handshakes at sporting events

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The Kentucky High School Athletic Association has issued a "Commissioner's Directive" advising schools not to hold organized post-game handshake lines because of too many fights and physical conflicts.

"While it is an obvious sign of sportsmanship and civility, many incidents have occurred ... where fights and physical conflicts have broken out," according to the Commissioner's Directive that went to schools on Tuesday. "Unfortunately, the adrenaline and effort required to participate in the sport sometimes seems to deplete the supply of judgment available to participants."

According to the missive, more than two dozen fights in the past three years in Kentucky have broken out at post-game ceremonies. Although athletic and school officials were buzzing about the order Tuesday afternoon, Commissioner Julian Tackett downplayed the order, saying it was "much ado about nothing."

There are no rules requiring the post-game handshake, and too many times, there hasn't been enough supervision to stop conflicts during the ceremony. Students can still shake hands with other players voluntarily.

"You're on notice, if you're going to do this, you're going to be accountable," Tackett said.

When first issued, the directive specifically stated: "It is hereby directed that teams and individuals do not participate in organized post-game handshake lines/ceremonies beyond that interaction that is required..."

After news of the directive led to criticism on social media Tuesday, the wording was changed to: "It is prescribed that teams and individuals do not participate in organized post game handshake lines/ceremonies beyond that interaction that is required ... and the individual unorchestrated actions by individual competitors."

If schools ignore the directive and hold an organized handshake, it is the responsibility of the school administrators and coaches, not referees and officials, to keep the peace. Any unsporting acts will result in a fine.

The directive also advises officials to leave directly after the game, without getting involved in any post-game activities such as handshakes. If game officials, who are independent contractors with the KHSAA, involve themselves in post-game activity, they will be penalized.

Tackett said that if parents were concerned about sportsmanship, "they wouldn't treat the referees like they do — chase them off the fields, follow them to cars, not to mention the language that's used."

In the revised directive later Tuesday, Tackett added notes stating: "Nothing about this directive is etched in stone as far as post game procedures. As the document states, the schools continue to have the option to have post-game handshakes as always, provided they are properly supervised."

Mason County football coach David Buchanan said his principal had already told him the Royals won't be shaking hands after games anymore. "I think it's sad, but I understand," Buchanan said.

Don Adkins, athletics director for the Fayette County Schools, said school administrators have always been responsible for post-game behavior. He said he would be meeting with all the school athletic directors to talk about the policy.

"As far as I'm concerned, I think our players should be held to that accountability," he said. "When the game is over, I want to shake hands with that guy, and tell the guy, good job."

Dean Geary, co-athletic director at West Jessamine High School, said all coaches at that school received the directive Tuesday and that he was going to start discussing the policy with them right away. Geary said the policy was on the agenda of a district athletic directors meeting later in the week.

Handshakes after a game generally occur everywhere from 4-year-olds' soccer matches to University of Kentucky basketball games.

But Bob Gardener, executive director of the National Federation of State High School Associations, which represents high school athletic associations including the KHSAA, said the same rule changes have happened in other states because of post-game incidents.

"The idea is that you simply end the game and get off the field," Gardener said.

He noted that sportsmanship has declined in athletics across the country.

"We have seen that erosion occur at almost every level; almost every state association can point to an incident like this," he said. "If that's what they feel is in the best interest, then the loss of that opportunity is something you have to live with."

Lexington Catholic boys' basketball coach Brandon Salsman said he's not sure what prompted the KHSAA directive, but he hopes to continue his team's practice of post-game handshakes.

"I'm a big proponent of sportsmanship, and we're going to shake hands, win or lose, unless my bosses tell me not to," Salsman said.

Reporters Valarie Honeycutt Spears and Mike Fields contributed to this report. Linda Blackford: (859) 231-1359 Twitter: @lbbblackford

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