

**On behalf of Coach Andre Montgomery:**

Physical coercion and sexual assault are unacceptable in any setting and have no place at Ooltewah High School. The criminal allegations against three members of our men's basketball team, if verified, will warrant very serious penalties. The facts are not yet public; however, there is a plethora of speculation and vilification, based on inaccurate reporting of the central events. Charges have been filed, and in our system of law, individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Everyone involved is cooperating to the fullest with the police and administrative inquiry while we wait to learn the truth from the facts.

Whatever that inquiry may show, it is already clear that three athletes acted in a manner inappropriate to a fellow Ooltewah team member by participating in the conduct as alleged by the Gatlinburg Police Department.

Athletics Director Jesse Nayadley and Principal James Jarvis are greatly appreciated for appropriately responding to the conduct in question even as we wait for the investigation to determine the truth despite inaccurate reports of the events from those who were not present or otherwise are misinformed. ***Their example in remaining calm and avoiding knee jerk responses is critical to obtaining justice for the alleged victim, alleged perpetrators and should bolster the confidence of the Ooltewah family – school board members, community members, students, administrators, coaches, parents, and athletes alike.***

While no restriction exists to limit individual comment on issues, particularly where there exists no connection to Ooltewah or its athletics programs, others in elected positions are limited in fueling any debate as to the fate of an HCDE employee but fail to observe their restriction. HCDE policies are clear: Article III, Section 3, 1.106 specifically requires Board Members to refrain from publicly criticizing employees. Further 1.202, Paragraph 8 requires a Board Member to abstain from individual counsel and action with regard to an employee and 1.400, p. 2, lines 9 – 15 prohibits comments about an employee during an open meeting and explains the rationale as to the prohibition.

To speculate, assume, or spin personal views designed to further political careers, or initiate an effort to have an employee dismissed through the start of a witch hunt, is improper and defamatory at best; and as a result, it is imperative that we all recognize that the issue affecting our community is not hazing or bullying. *Rather, it is the unilateral decision of three individuals currently charged with a sexual offense. Sexual offenses must not be reduced to popular buzz words like hazing or bullying. Ever.*

***More importantly, it is critical to our community as a whole and to our injured player that everyone understand that there is no culture of sexual assault at Ooltewah. Similarly, there is no culture of hazing or abuse at Ooltewah where athletes are encouraged or taught to violate the law (or even simple human decency) by teachers, administrators or coaches.***

As alleged, this is a terrible and shameful act perpetrated by three individuals.

To date, Coach Andre Montgomery has been vilified, subjected to racial epithets and slurs as well as hyper-scrutinized in spite of responding appropriately. ***Such witch hunting is unacceptable; especially where all HCDE protocols and HCDE policies were followed. And most importantly, the three actors are to be held accountable for their decision. Not someone else.***

***Our community does not and should not condone ascribing blame for someone else's conduct. Yet, that is what most commenting have done. Everyone needs to stop - even those charged with being impartial and unbiased as members of the HCDE School Board – asserting that someone else has to lose their job because they are responsible for the actions of three.***

Coach Montgomery's entire life has been about children and their welfare. He chose to become a coach furthering his passion for children and their development. This act by three individuals against one of their own is inconsistent with what Coach Montgomery knows of them – in the classroom and in the athletic arena.

However, while out of character, this act is neither acceptable nor excusable and certainly not condoned by Coach Montgomery.

The act of three individuals should not diminish Coach Montgomery's reputation or his valuable contributions to Ooltewah High School, the Ooltewah student body or its athletics programs. The justice system will resolve our community's injured player's issues, not public sentiment. Thank you.