

Ban placed on Marist's 'team spit'

By **Ross Forman. Special to the Tribune**

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

FEBRUARY 13, 2003

After the second practice of the season last September, the lights went out in the Marist locker room at the Southwest Ice Arena in Crestwood. Veteran players knew what was happening and tried to prepare, perhaps by throwing their hockey bags over their heads.

Then the "team spit" started.

Less than 30 seconds later, the spitting stopped on what had become a Marist hockey hazing tradition aimed at the freshmen, of whom there were four on the team at the time.

Marist coach Rick Freiberg received a complaint about the incident and, at the team's next practice, told his team that no more hazing traditions would be allowed.

Though he didn't specifically mention the incident, "we knew what he was talking about," said junior Mike Lonkar.

Marist Principal Larry Tucker and the school moderator, Brother Tim Brady, also received a complaint about the incident.

They instructed Lonkar and teammates Sean McGann and Chris Palmer to each individually apologize in person to the offended freshman.

But they never got the chance. Two days later the 14-year-old freshman honor student transferred to Mt. Carmel.

Last Friday the Amateur Hockey Association of Illinois ruled the "team spit" completely inappropriate. The AHAI suspended Freiberg for two years. Lonkar received a 30-day suspension and Palmer was given a nine-month suspension.

McGann was suspended indefinitely for failing to attend the AHAI hearing. But on Wednesday AHAI reinstated him pending a future hearing after it reviewed a letter from McGann explaining his absence.

"The spitting has sort of been a hazing tradition," said McGann, an assistant captain in his second year on the team who will attend St. Norbert's in the fall. "It's childish, but every team has a hazing."

Freiberg will appeal his suspension, as will Palmer, a junior. Lonkar said he will not appeal, fearing that an appeal hearing might ruin any chance he has to return to the ice this season.

AHAI President Bob Mathson and AHAI rules and ethics chairman Pete Humann would not comment on the case or the suspensions.

"What I did by spitting in the locker room was wrong, but I think the penalties were wrong too," said Lonkar, who has 15 goals and 17 assists. "I guess I learned to never again mess with freshmen."

Copyright © 2021, Chicago Tribune