

Appeals committee reduces football coach's suspension

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An appeals committee has lessened the punishment imposed on Sir Winston Churchill head football coach Peter Perron.

Perron was originally suspended by the Niagara Region High School Athletic Association for five years from coaching football and banned from coaching other sports until 2012 after it was determined Perron lied to a NRHSAA transfer committee about using an ineligible player in his team's first two games of the season.

Following an appeal heard Monday to the NRHSAA's executive committee, the suspension was shortened to three years for football and until September 2011 for other sports.

"The basis of the committee's decision was the notion that obviously coaches are meant to be exemplars for young people, as they are and as they should be. Its position was that Peter had violated that coaching creed and dubbed it as unprofessional behaviour," Churchill principal Mike Simpson said.

Most of the high school coaches -- both teachers and outside coaches -- informally polled last week felt the punishment was much too severe and Simpson had hoped for a better outcome from the appeals committee.

"We weren't there to exonerate him. We weren't there to say he hadn't made an error in judgment. We were there to try and convince them that five years was an excessive amount of time to take a man away from a thing that he has been dedicating his co-curricular life to for the last 23 years."

Simpson came to the hearing with an armful of testimonials and character references from the community at large, coaches, players and parents, both past and present.

"They didn't necessarily have all the facts, but I certainly let the committee know that there was a lot of support out there for Mr. Perron as the coach and to be part of the program."

Perron also received many expressions of support.

"There was a tremendous amount of support that came very quickly for Peter and in protest of what they felt was unfair treatment," Simpson said.

The incident is the lone blemish on Perron's long exemplary career of coaching football and field events in track and field.

"Now there is going to be a huge void created," Simpson.

The student/athletes will miss Perron as much as he misses them.

"It's hundreds or likely thousands of hours that could have been dedicated to his family or other things, but it was all poured back into the school. Now those opportunities have been taken away," Simpson said.

The Churchill football team had two wins taken away from them as the result of using an ineligible player. It cost the team home-field advantage in the second round of the playoffs and a chance to play a less formidable opponent. The Bulldogs are at Holy Cross at 1 p. m. Friday in the Varsity 1 semifinals.