

# Ontario High School

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Dr. Jodi Elizondo  
Principal

Melissa Judson  
Associate Principal

Nathan Sandberg  
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Josh Mink  
Athletic Director

10/2/19

To: Tony Cade

From: Dr. Jodi Elizondo, Principal; Josh Mink, Athletic Director

Re: Dismissal as OHS Head Football Coach effective 9/25/19

Mr. Cade,

On 9/25/19 we met to discuss concerns brought to our attention about your behavior as the OHS head football coach. After extensive investigation and hearing your responses to these concerns, it was determined we could not be confident that this behavior would not continue and relieved you of your duties effective immediately. We gave you the option of leaving this position as a resignation, and that is what you chose. As per your request, here is a written account of the issues:

Of the concerns addressed, you confirmed that your practice is to call players "numnuts" (a derogatory term defined as a "slow-witted, "unresponsive" or "inept" person) and "jackwagon" (a derogatory term defined as "lazy" or "worthless") and "clowns". You stated "that's just football" and that you have never been told in the course of your career not to call players those names. You did not recognize that young players would find it difficult to tell you they felt this was demeaning or embarrassing, or the negative impact this would have on your team with the imbalance of power regarding your position and their position. You did not see how this could be perceived as bullying behavior. When asked if you use those names to address students in your classroom, you said you do not and did not have an answer when asked why students in the classroom stop being students on the field in your care as an educator at OHS. At no point in the discussion did you recognize that calling students derogatory names was a problem, instead defending that it was "football" and that you have never been told that was not right. You chose to leave the clear impression in our meeting that you do not possess the professional lens required to protect our students from your behavior and that it would continue.

You expressed a desire to your supervisor Athletic Director Josh Mink to take the keys away from one of the football coaches because their family had brought up a concern about you with administration the day before. You were told that the concern was still being evaluated and Mr. Mink told you it would be a bad idea to ask for his keys and would be seen as retaliation by you for them coming forward. Later that day you approached Mr. Mink during a volleyball game and became inappropriately and visibly upset with him when you found out that you were to meet with us the next day to discuss this concern. You confirmed that following that interaction, you immediately

went out to the parking lot and upon seeing that coach, told him you wanted his keys. When the coach said he would only give his keys to the district and suggested you both go into the building to discuss this with Mr. Mink, you told him that Mr. Mink already knew, giving him the false impression that Mr. Mink was in agreement that this coach should relinquish his keys to you. When asked why you went against your supervisor's direction, you stated you were "frustrated" and that everyone was "getting you in trouble". When asked what made you think you were "in trouble" when we had not even met with you yet to explain the issue(s), you indicated it was because we called kids in and now, in your opinion, in the one day since that time they were acting out in practice because they knew all they had to do was "tell on you". Your description of their behavior portrayed you felt you had lost control of your team in one day because players were asked questions by administration, as done in routine investigation, and this appeared to send you into a panic. You also said you saw the player and his parent in the office talking to administration and you did not know what was going on, so you made the assumption you were in "trouble" and that "frustrated" you. Your self-imposed fear of being "in trouble" based on your emotional assumptions caused you to go against your supervisor Mr. Mink's statement to you hours before and impulsively and inappropriately ask the coach for his keys. This lack of respect for authority and the dishonesty used in trying to get the keys from the coach to satisfy your emotional impulse is at complete odds with the professional integrity we require of our staff in this district.

A claim was made by a parent that at the La Grande game you embarrassed their child by loudly asking for a replacement for him out of obvious frustration and the crowd heard it, and that you later engaged in conversations with people who were not part of the coaching staff about this player and the incident. You confirmed that you did not say the player or parent's name, but that you did speak with others, to include other parents, about this player and his parent and confirmed that those you spoke with knew who you were talking about. You stated you spoke with these people because you wanted their "perception" of your behavior, completely disregarding any impact on the player. You were resistant to understanding how this could negatively impact the player and his family and that this was inappropriate and unexpected behavior for a coach. After much discussion in our meeting, you eventually admitted this was unprofessional behavior. It was very concerning you had to be convinced that this was inappropriate, leading us to believe you would be unable to keep it from happening again.

You confirmed that at least three times you told players at practice Tuesday evening that they could "Go ahead and turn me into administration again" the day before our meeting and one day after we had questioned players. You said you did this out of frustration that they were part of "getting you in trouble". When asked if you knew what players we had spoken to, you indicated you knew of two players specifically. According to your own statement, this means you knew your comments were directed to at least two specific players, so for those two at the very least your retaliatory comments were intentional, which is alarming. We told you that we had spoken to many more and asked how you thought your comments to the team and these individuals, that were obviously said in retaliation, would be taken by those players who understand

you to be in a position of power over them. You indicated that you "just said it" as if the emotion driving that inappropriate behavior was an excusable reason. You rolled your eyes when pressed to tell us how we could trust the judgment of someone who will take out on our players the irrational paranoia about "being in trouble" and the players' innocent participation in our investigation. Your reaction to this part of the discussion was defensive and demonstrated your support and belief your actions were not inappropriate and that our kids should just be able to "handle" what you try to pass off as "toughness", but in reality is intimidation. We cannot knowingly allow our players to be exposed to someone who believes this behavior is acceptable, cannot control their emotions, and refuses to acknowledge the responsibility of the balance of power.

We also discussed your pattern of lack of approachability, resistance to teamwork and disrespect for the hierarchy of job supervision within the athletic systems of OHS as experienced and witnessed by administration since your arrival, as well as your temper and open hostility when you are ever questioned. An example of this is earlier this season you received a text from your supervisor Josh Mink asking what coaches were currently with you on the Mazama trip. You answered with the names, but then asked "Who is asking just fyi?". When you did not receive a reply to this question three minutes later, you texted "I don't get how I'm questioned (sic) everything I do ... I got 50 kids on an 8 hr trip. Nothing but compliments in all we do here. But seems my own school wants to find something I do wrong". Your knee-jerk, bizarre, and hostile reaction to being asked a very basic, appropriate question by your supervisor was representative of how most interactions have been with you since your arrival. You consistently demonstrate an inability to work with others and a paranoia that people are "after you". In this meeting itself, you demonstrated no ability to be reflective; you were condescending at times, argumentative, defensive and expressed an attitude that everyone was "out to get you". You showed no concern when told that your players were struggling with how you treat them; you spent your time with us defending your "style" of coaching. You showed no concern when your lack of respect and treatment of Mr. Mink and Dr. Elizondo, your supervisors, was expressed to you. You finished your meeting with us by attempting to stare Dr. Elizondo down in an obvious attempt to be intimidating to the point she felt compelled to actually say, "Don't stare me down", to which you replied, "I'm not staring you down", as you continued to stare down all the way out the door. It was extremely immature and unprofessional, as well as alarming behavior. If you will do this with an adult who is your supervisor, it is easy to see what our athletes endure and the way you chose to behave in that situation itself supports our decision to remove you from this position.

We told you of the pattern of behavior described by the many that were interviewed as "throwing tantrums", "can't talk to Cade because he always gets mad", "goes way overboard to make kids feel very bad instead of just correcting us", "we just want to get through the season", and "I don't think I'll be back next year". They were specifically asked to compare what they have known in their previous athletic experiences here at OHS with what was happening with you on the team to ensure that this was not just a difference in opinion of what is and what is not being "too tough". It should be made very clear that our players did not indicate they felt you were "too

tough"; in fact, their answers indicated to us a pattern of intimidation and bullying that they themselves struggled to label but knew was wrong. The answers of those questioned clearly and consistently indicated your behavior was well outside the realm of how anyone would expect to be treated by a staff member of Ontario 8C or any responsible, professional high school educator and/or coach and had nothing to do with "challenging" our players to be tough.

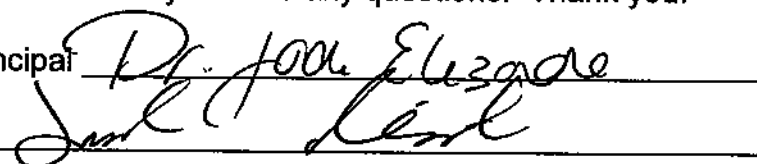
It was apparent from your comments, reasoning, and body language in our meeting, combined with the behavior administration has experienced with you that aligns with the descriptions received during the investigation, that we cannot reasonably have confidence that this type of behavior will not continue and told you that we were relieving you of your position effective immediately. You expressed frustration that you were not given a "warning". It was explained to you that when a coach is hired there is an expectation they understand they cannot retaliate against players, call them derogatory names, create an atmosphere where being "tough" is being perceived as intimidation or bullying, and that a coach will respect and follow the chain of command and hierarchy of supervision. You should have known how to behave in a manner that was professional, collegial, and protective of our players when hired and a "warning" will not protect our players from your lack of foundational knowledge and ability. You were relieved of your duties not because a player and his parent came to us with a concern originally, but because of the subsequent extensive investigation, your confirmation of the behaviors listed above, and your egregious lack of ownership and fundamental understanding about how your behavior was harmful to all when we met. In fact, the entire initial complaint is not even represented in the reasons for your dismissal. The final determining factor for your dismissal actually rested on your inability to control your emotions with our players when you retaliated against them with your comments about speaking with administration. We cannot trust someone who places satisfying their emotional impulses above the well-being of our players. We require more basic professional maturity than you have demonstrated.

Finally, it is important to know that this was not a question of a coach "being too tough" on players; this school district believes athletes need to be stretched through support and challenges. We know that there is a special relationship between athletes and their coaches. We also know that when a player feels like they are being embarrassed, bullied or intimidated by their coach that they will likely not come forward for fear of appearing weak or retaliation, something you have proven they assessed correctly. This is not a case of you trying to toughen up our players; this is repeated cases of you taking advantage of the imbalance of power and causing harm to our players and program through your inability to control your emotions and your resistance to working respectfully within the hierarchy of the OHS athletic system that provides checks and balances for the safety of our children.

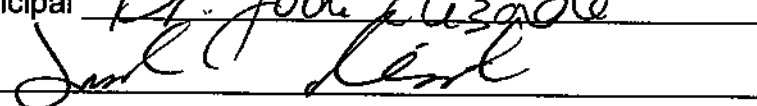
As administration, we have a responsibility to protect our players. You are not the first coach who has ever received a complaint; however, you are the first coach in this administrations' tenure that has reacted in such an impulsive, irrational, and disrespectful manner. Had you followed the advice of your supervisor, allowed the

investigation to take its regular course over the two short days prior to meeting with you, not retaliated against players and been reflective rather than defensive and argumentative in our meeting, we might not be where we are today. Although you showed great promise regarding promotion of our team and players on social media, camps, and other highly-visible activities that the public appreciated, you crossed lines repeatedly and without using judgment expected of a licensed educator and experienced coach formally trained in best practices for student relations. The public does not see this part so it is difficult for them to understand your removal given their limited context, but this is a non-negotiable safety issue for our players and the public does expect us to protect our children. We hired you in good faith and are disheartened that this is how it turned out for our players, staff, school and community. You remain a teacher at OHS and our expectation is that you will make sure your actions going forward do not bring any harm, discomfort, or distraction to the students or staff of Ontario 8C. Please let us know if you have any questions. Thank you.

Dr. Jodi Elizondo, Principal

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dr. Jodi Elizondo", written over a horizontal line.

Josh Mink, A.D.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Mink", written over a horizontal line.