



FHSAA School ID: 804

Subject: Gadsden County (Havana) – Compliance Notification LTR – Football

Dear Mr. Marlon Ball:

This communication addresses the Florida High School Athletic Association findings related to **Gadsden County (Havana)** in compliance with FHSAA Bylaws and Policies.

The Florida High School Athletic Association appreciates your efforts to make sure the student-athletes in our state all receive equal and fair opportunities.

The following information is organized as follows:

I. Findings of Fact

II. Specific Violations of Florida Statutes, Bylaws, Policies, and/or Administrative Procedures

III. Conclusions

IV. Sanctions

V. Corrective Actions

VI. Appeals

I. Findings of Fact

Based on the preponderance of evidence, we find the following facts (who, what, where, when) to be controlling:

- *Gadsden County allowed four (4) student-athletes [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] to participate during the 2024-25 football season without properly reporting the students as non-traditional students.*
- *Gadsden County allowed student-athletes [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] to participate in the spring jamboree without properly reporting them as non-traditional students. When requested, Gadsden County was unable to provide the original EL12 verification form for [REDACTED], indicating that the EL12 form was either incomplete or not properly filed at the time of submission. The EL12 verification form*

- submitted for [REDACTED] is missing the signature date for Harrison Smith, rendering the form incomplete.
- Student-athletes [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] submitted EL12 forms containing falsified information. The FHSAA revised the EL12 form on June 24, 2025. The updated EL12 form was not made available to the public until July 7, 2025. The EL12 forms for these student-athletes have the June 2025 revision date in the upper right corner; however, they were signed by the student, parent/legal guardian, and notary with dates that predate the public release of the form. This indicates that the dates listed on the EL12 forms were falsified, raising concerns regarding the authenticity of the documentation.
 - Gadsden County allowed student-athlete [REDACTED] to participate during the 2024-25 season with an incomplete EL12 form. The submitted EL12 form was signed by the parent/student and notarized on August 19, 2024. The verification form was signed by Harrison Smith. However, the digital signature for Harrison Smith shows it was actually signed on May 21, 2025. This inconsistency indicates that the EL12 form was incomplete at the time it was submitted to Gadsden County.
 - Gadsden County permitted three student-athletes — [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] — to participate in athletic activities throughout the summer using outdated EL2 forms.
 - [REDACTED] submitted an EL2 form last revised in March 2023.
 - [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] submitted EL2 forms last revised in April 2023.
 - Gadsden County and Head Coach Russell Ellington allowed eight (8) student-athletes to participate in summer activities with the team prior to the students fully completing the non-traditional student registration process.

II. Specific Violations of Florida Statutes, Bylaws, Policies, and/or Administrative Procedures

The facts set forth in paragraph I. above violate the following Florida Statutes, Bylaws, Policies, and/or Administrative Procedures:

Bylaw 1.4.21 Major Violations – Major violations are those that are committed intentionally, or that provide a significant competitive advantage, or are committed due to a lack of administrative control of the interscholastic athletic program regardless of whether the school claims ignorance of the rule(s) violated, including, but not limited to, knowingly allowing an ineligible student to participate in a contest or violations to the recruiting and sportsmanship policies of the association (§ 1006.20(2)(f)1, F.S.). Multiple secondary violations may together be considered a major violation. A secondary violation committed by a school already on probation may be considered a major violation.

Bylaw 9.1.2.2 Falsification of Information. *A student and/or parent/legal guardian appointed by a court of competent jurisdiction who falsifies any enrollment or eligibility document shall be declared ineligible to represent any member school for a period of one year from the date of discovery*

Policy 16.7.1 Non-Traditional Student Defined.

Non-traditional Students are students that are not enrolled in and do not physically attend the school at which they participate.

Policy 16.7.3 School Registration Process.

The school must register each Non-Traditional Student with this association, utilizing the official Association process as approved by the Executive Director and outlined in Administrative Procedure 1.8, each year before adding the student to a roster and allowing the student to participate in an interscholastic contest. It remains the responsibility of the school to verify the eligibility of all returning non-traditional students.

Policy 16.11.1 *Allowing students to participate (see Bylaw 9.2.1.2) without a completed EL2 form (Pre-Participation Physical Evaluation, see Bylaw 9.7) will subject the school to a monetary penalty of a minimum of \$500 per student and/or other sanctions.*

Policy 16.11.4 *Allowing students to participate in an interscholastic contest without properly registering a non-traditional student (see Policy 16.7.3) may subject the school to a monetary penalty of a minimum \$100 per student and/or other sanctions.*

Policy 20.1.1 Not Regulated in Summer. *The FHSAA does not regulate the athletic activities of member schools held with their own students during the summer as defined herein with the exception of football. The individual member school principal, district school superintendent, district school board, charter or private school governing board are responsible for adopting regulations governing the activities of their respective schools during this period of time. All member schools are required to follow policies 40, 41, 42 and 43 during the summer (§ 1006.165, F.S.)*

Policy 37.2.1 General Regulation. *No school employee, athletic department staff member, representative of the school's athletic interests or third parties, such as an independent person, business, or organization, may be involved, directly or indirectly, in giving an impermissible benefit to any student or any member of his/her family for the purpose of participating in interscholastic athletics, or to any student-athlete who already attends a school.*

Policy 46.1.1 *General failure to comply with FHSAA Policies or Administrative Procedures (Policies and Administrative Procedures Preambles)*

III. Conclusions

By applying the above stated Finding of Facts to the above stated Florida Statutes, Bylaws, Policies, and/or Administrative Procedures, we reach the following conclusions:

- *Gadsden County allowed student-athletes [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] to participate during the 2024-25 football season without properly reporting the students as non-traditional students, violating Policy 16.11.4.*
- *Gadsden County allowed student-athletes [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] to participate in the spring game without properly reporting them as non-traditional students, violating Policy 16.11.4.*
- *Student-athletes [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] submitted EL12 forms containing falsified information, violating Policy 9.1.2.2.*
- *Gadsden County allowed student-athlete [REDACTED] to participate during the 2024-25 season with an incomplete EL12 form, violating Policy 46.1.1.*
- *Gadsden County allowed student-athletes [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] to participate throughout the summer with outdated EL2 forms, violating Policy 16.1.1.*
- *Gadsden County and Head Coach Russell Ellington allowed eight (8) student-athletes to participate in summer activities with the team prior to the students fully completing the non-traditional student registration process, violating Policy 37.2.1 and Policy 20.1.1.*

IV. Sanctions

Based on the above conclusions, **Gadsden County (Havana)** is assessed the following:

1. *In accordance with FHSAA Policy 10.1.2(a), **Gadsden County** is reprimanded.*
2. *In accordance with FHSAA Bylaw 10.1.2(d), **Gadsden County** is placed on Restrictive Probation for one calendar year. **Gadsden County** is restricted from participating in the **FHSAA State Series**, for football, during the 2025-26 school year.*
3. *In accordance with FHSAA Policy 16.11.4, **Gadsden County** is assessed a monetary penalty of \$500.*
4. *In accordance with FHSAA Policy 46.1.1, **Gadsden County** is assessed a monetary penalty of \$1,000.*
5. *In accordance with FHSAA Policy 16.11.1, **Gadsden County** is assessed a monetary penalty of \$1,500, however \$1,500 will be held in abeyance due to the required forms being submitted, though outdated.*

6. *In accordance with FHSAA Policy 36.7.3.2, **Gadsden County** is assessed a monetary penalty of \$2,500 per student (8 students) for a total of \$20,000.*

Summary of Monetary Sanctions: \$21,500

Based on the above conclusions, Gadsden County student-athletes, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED],

[REDACTED], and [REDACTED] are assessed the following:

1. *In accordance with FHSAA Bylaw 9.1.2.2, [REDACTED] is ineligible until **July 24, 2026**, at any FHSAA member school.*
2. *In accordance with FHSAA Bylaw 9.1.2.2, [REDACTED] is ineligible until **July 24, 2026**, at any FHSAA member school.*
3. *In accordance with FHSAA Bylaw 9.1.2.2, [REDACTED] is ineligible until **July 24, 2026**, at any FHSAA member school.*
4. *In accordance with FHSAA Bylaw 9.1.2.2, [REDACTED] is ineligible until **July 24, 2026**, at any FHSAA member school.*
5. *In accordance with FHSAA Bylaw 9.1.2.2, [REDACTED] is ineligible until **July 24, 2026**, at any FHSAA member school.*
6. *In accordance with FHSAA Bylaw 9.1.2.2, [REDACTED] is ineligible until **July 24, 2026**, at any FHSAA member school.*
7. *In accordance with FHSAA Bylaw 9.1.2.2, [REDACTED] is ineligible until **July 24, 2026**, at any FHSAA member school.*
8. *In accordance with FHSAA Bylaw 9.1.2.2, [REDACTED] is ineligible until **July 24, 2026**, at any FHSAA member school.*

Based on the above conclusions, **Coach Russell Ellington** shall receive his first offense and is assessed the following:

1. *In accordance with Policy 36.7.4.1 (F.S. 1006.20(2)(b)2), **Coach Russell Ellington** shall forfeit \$5,000 of his salary, if applicable. This is not paid to the FHSAA.*
2. *In accordance with Policy 36.7.5, **Coach Russell Ellington** will be ineligible to coach or attend an interscholastic football contest, at any level for **one (1) year, beginning the week of the preseason classic for the 2025-26 season.***

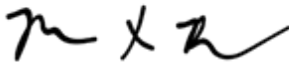
VI. Appeals

The decision by this office may be appealed to the Florida High School Athletic Association Sectional or Infraction Appeals Committee as directed under Bylaws 10.4.7 and 10.6.4:

- ***Bylaw 10.4.7 Appeals of Executive Director's Findings.*** *The principal of a member school or his/her designee, or any other individual, who is found to be in violation of the rules of this Association by the Executive Director, whether or not such finding results in the imposition of penalty, may appeal the finding of the Executive Director if he/she takes issue with it, or may appeal the penalty imposed, if any, if he/she, while not disagreeing with the finding, believes the penalty to be too severe.*
- ***Bylaw 10.6.4 Appeals of the Executive Director's Findings.*** *To appeal the finding of the Executive Director, the appeal must be filed so that it is received in the office of this Association within ten (10) business days of the receipt of the Executive Director's finding and/or notification of the imposition of penalty. Failure to file an appeal so that it is received in the office of this Association within the ten (10) business days allowed shall be deemed a waiver of the right to appeal as granted herein.*

The information contained in this letter is being provided to the FHSAA member school. It is the responsibility of the FHSAA member school to notify and provide a copy of this letter to all parties mentioned regarding their sanction.

Sincerely,



Malcolm Pollock
Administrator of Eligibility & Compliance, FHSAA

cc: Craig Damon, Executive Director, FHSAA
Scott Jamison, Associate Executive Director, Athletic Services, FHSAA
Ryan Harrison, Administrator of Sports Information & Creative Content, FHSAA
Kelvin Richardson, Administrator of Public Relations, FHSAA
Matt Baranyk, Administrator of School Finance, FHSAA
Robbie Lindeman, Coordinator of Athletics, FHSAA
Eric Toussaint, Athletic Director, Gadsden County