

Parents rally to football coach's defense

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Residents voice support for Chossek after critics of struggling team prompt School Board to review program

Responding to critics of the struggling Grafton High School football program, a group of residents voiced support for head coach Ben Chossek at a School Board meeting Monday.

About a dozen parents and coaches appeared at the meeting because they believed the board was going to evaluate Chossek in closed session. Although Board President Terry Ziegler told the group the session was to discuss the "state of the football program," several parents said it was inappropriate for the board to review the team or its coaches in mid-season.

"We're here to show support for Coach Chossek," said Ron Weisflog, whose son is a starting player on the team.

"Leave him alone. He's doing a great job. The kids are enjoying themselves, and they respect the coach."

Chossek, who is in his fourth year as Grafton's varsity head coach and teaches physical education at the high school, has come under fire from residents unhappy with the football program's lack of success. After going 1-8 in 2009, the team was 0-9 last season and has failed to score this year while losing its first four games.

Ziegler said complaints prompted the board to review the program.

"Last year, there were people who tried to remove the head coach," Ziegler said. "This is not a job evaluation, but we need to consider how we'll move forward."

Supt. Jeff Pechura said he asked the board to discuss the program and met with Chossek last Friday to discuss that process.

"I told the board we need to be proactive in light of what happened last year and this year," he told the audience.

All the residents who spoke at Monday's meeting voiced support for Chossek, including assistant football coaches Ben Benzschawel and Tony Rieck.

"We're not teaching kids wins and losses. That will come along as they play," said Rieck, who is also the school's head varsity hockey coach.

"We're teaching them to be young men. You have that with Ben as a head coach."

Weisflog said Grafton faces a tough challenge as one of the smallest schools in the North Shore Conference, where football is dominated by perennially strong programs at larger schools such

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as Homestead, Cedarburg and Germantown.

Weisflog also noted that Grafton has an inexperienced football team, with only eight seniors on its roster. About a dozen players are sophomores, most of whom are starters.

"If you want to improve this, get us out of the North Shore Conference," Weisflog told the board. "It's going to be hard to compete with all the (Division 1 and 2) teams."

Weisflog said any evaluation of Chossek and his staff should first be done by the athletic director and principal before going to the board.

"Why is it the concern of the School Board if (the team) is not scoring points?" he asked.

Chossek, who did not attend Monday's meeting, said Tuesday that he understands why the football program is being scrutinized.

"When you're having a season like we're having, I don't think it's unusual to ask questions," he said. "It's nice to have the support of people, but I understand there are others who feel differently.

"If there are concerns, they need to be addressed."

The critics have not been a major distraction, according to Chossek. "My focus continues to be on getting the team ready to play," he said.

Pechura said Tuesday that he has heard from parents supportive and critical of Chossek, and school officials have a responsibility to consider both views. Wins and losses are not a high priority in gauging team success or job performance, he added.

"Everybody would like to win more, but our focus is on other things like developing character, discipline and promoting sportsmanship," he said.

Athletic director Scott Parsons said Tuesday that coaches are typically evaluated at the end of each season. He said he hasn't begun any reviews of fall coaches and hasn't heard from a large number of parents critical of the football staff.

"There are people on both sides, but I can't say I've heard more from one side or the other," Parsons said.