

CONFIDENTIAL INVESTIGATION REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

On October 21, 2022, this office was hired by the Marblehead Public Schools (hereinafter “District”) to conduct a bullying investigation after an anonymous complaint was filed against the Marblehead High School girls’ soccer coach, John Dormer. The complaint was filed anonymously by one family on behalf of their daughter (hereinafter “Complainant”), but it was noted from the outset that several other families joined in the complaint against the coach.¹ Each family was seeking anonymity in order to participate in the investigation due to fear of retaliation.

The District sought an independent investigation from a neutral third party. Dr. Paula Donnelly, the Director of Student Services, contacted this office upon receipt of the complaint. On October 31, 2022, Principal Daniel Bauer issued a written notice to the Complainant and Coach Dormer about the complaint and investigation. The Complainant then shared a list of families willing to speak with this Investigator. This Investigator contacted each family to schedule a time to meet with them as part of the investigation.

II. INVESTIGATION

Beginning on November 8, 2022 and over the course of the next several weeks, this Investigator met with eleven families who came forward willing to speak with me. Five current or former players participated with one or both of their parents in an interview. The other interviews included one or both of the parents of current or past players. I then spoke separately with the two varsity assistant coaches, Jaimee Callahan and Kiley Allosso, on December 1, 2022. On December 6, 2022, I met separately and together with Principal Bauer and Greg Ceglarski, the Marblehead High School Athletic Director. I then met with Coach Dormer on December 8, 2022 and had follow up conversations with him on December 9 and 12, 2022. Each person interviewed had the opportunity to share information, answer and ask questions, and follow up with additional information.

III. LEGAL STANDARD

The complaint was filed pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 71, §370,

¹ This is the first time an official complaint was filed against Coach Dormer but several families, including the Complainant, have previously raised concerns with Principal Bauer and Mr. Ceglarski about Coach Dormer.

which prohibits bullying by a member of the school staff, including an athletic coach.² The definition of bullying is:

The repeated use... by a member of a school staff including, but not limited to... athletic coach... of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that:

- (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property;
- (ii) places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property;
- (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the victim;
- (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or
- (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Under the law, a hostile environment is defined as “a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the student’s education.”

Retaliation is prohibited “against any person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.”

IV. SUMMARY

As previously mentioned, eleven different families came forward to speak with me. The District did not seek out families who wanted to come forward; the message was passed through the original Complainant to families that this Investigator would be available to speak with anyone who was willing to come forward.³ This was explained to Coach Dormer.

In order to honor the anonymity requests of those involved, certain identifiable information will not be shared in this report, including names, grade level, position, and other

² Although this complaint was not filed under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, it is important to note that no information was shared during the course of the investigation suggesting discrimination by Coach Dormer based on sex.

³ Shortly after the season ended, one family coincidentally reached out to another family to share their concerns about Coach Dormer. That family was unaware an investigation was going on but the other family had already spoken with this Investigator, so they shared this Investigator’s contact information with the other family.

facts that may allow a person to be identified. The following includes a brief description of the general role of one or more of the players who were either directly interviewed or indirectly involved in the investigation through interviews with one or both of their parents:



In speaking with those involved, several recurring themes came out in my conversations, including emotional and psychological damage, bullying, and retaliation. Some other issues raised by families were outside the scope of this investigation (including but not limited to nepotism with respect to Coach Dormer’s daughters being in the program, MIAA violations, end of year awards, and concern with the process for choosing captains at the last team meeting). However, feedback was shared with Coach Dormer during my conversations with him and it was also shared directly with Dr. Donnelly, Principal Bauer, and Mr. Ceglarski. Below is a summary of information that I found to be relevant to this investigation.

A. Poor Communication

Each of the families interviewed discussed concerns about Coach Dormer’s poor communication with players and families throughout the season. While this topic may appear to be outside the scope of this investigation, his lack of communication had a negative emotional and psychological impact on players and created what was described as a “hostile” or “toxic” environment for some. As such, it is included here.

Coach Dormer acknowledged the confusion and chaos at the beginning of the season and blamed it on the program being down a coach the first few weeks of the season. However, this Investigator found that the communication concerns continued even after a new coach was hired and had a persistent negative impact on several of the players.

I also found that his lack of communication at the beginning of the season resulted in players and families reaching their own conclusions about why certain decisions were made throughout the season. This perpetuated a continuing negative environment because their perception of his words and actions - whether accurate or not - became their reality.

a. Players' Role within the Program

Of particular importance for this investigation, Coach Dormer's lack of communication at the beginning of this past season impacted certain players on all three teams within the soccer program (varsity, JV, and JV2) and resulted in unnecessary - and likely avoidable - anxiety and stress for some of the players. Specifically, a published roster was never issued to players and families; instead, Coach Dormer (and sometimes one of the assistant coaches) had individual conversations with each of the players informing them what team they made and what role they would serve on that team (core varsity, practice player, or swing player). This resulted in players being confused about their own role and the role of others within the program.

According to Coach Dormer and the assistant coaches, he does not like to cut players from the program.⁴ While this certainly gives everyone interested an opportunity to be part of the soccer program, it also makes for large teams. In order to accommodate the large number of players, Coach Dormer offers certain players options within the program, rather than assigning them to a team. For example, after tryouts Coach Dormer spoke with several players and told them they had the option to either (1) be placed on JV and get a lot of playing time, or (2) be on the varsity team and not get much playing time. Each player can then make their own decision. A group of five players opted to be "practice players" on varsity and understood that they would be part of the varsity team and go to all the practices, games, and team events, but they would likely not get much playing time in the games.

For the first time this season, Coach Dormer created another group called "swing players." This group consisted of younger players who were not quite ready to play at the varsity level but would benefit from the varsity experience and help prepare them for next year. The concept was that these players could move back and forth between varsity and JV. However, clear information and expectations about this concept was not shared with players or families, causing confusion and angst for some of the players. One parent said "You never knew who was going to show up to games." Some of the players were "moving from team to team with little to no information." This was described as a "very anxiety-inducing situation" so much so that one player was having panic attacks due to the uncertainty. Another player described that it was "unsettling to have no expectations until the last minute." This lack of clarity put a lot of pressure on these young teenagers and had a profound psychological impact on several players.

On August 28, 2022, Coach Dormer shared a spreadsheet with the assistant coaches after the tryouts were over; this spreadsheet labeled each girl as either a varsity player (17 total), a varsity/JV swing player (6 total), or a practice player (5 total). Upon reviewing the spreadsheet, the varsity players and the swing players were listed together in one section of the spreadsheet

⁴ Mr. Ceglarski informed me that he supports this decision.

with a running list of 23 girls combined for the roster. The practice players were listed separately and not included in the overall roster count; because of this, there was no indication that practice players were actually *on* the varsity roster or would play in games. The spreadsheet also included definitions of what swing players and practice players were:

A swing player was defined as a “player who will be an asset at practice in our preparation for games and who will also be a support/cheer/track stats during games. I suggest 3 or 4 of these girls dress for a varsity game and the others play in the JV game. These player[s] could actively play in games they dress for. Swing players can transition into regular.”

A practice player was defined as a “player who will be an asset at practice in our preparation for games. These players would be given the opportunity to also play full time on JV instead.”

However, because the spreadsheet was not shared with families and this information was not clearly communicated, I found that this lack of transparency had a substantial negative impact on some of the players.

Not only were individual players confused about their own role within the program, but certain information was not shared amongst the different groupings Coach Dormer created, and this caused divisiveness amongst the players. For example, those interviewed reported that the core varsity team was not initially told that the practice players were on the team, which resulted in this group of players being left out of team activities at the beginning of the season. A parent said the practice players being left out of team activities “immediately created a divide” between the varsity players and this group. One of the practice players chose to be on varsity because she just wanted to be part of the team and included in activities with the team. This lack of communication caused her to feel left out and not a part of the team right from the beginning of the season. It was reported by multiple people that another player had to inform the captains that the practice players were on the team and should be included in the team activities. The captains then asked Coach Dormer if they were on the team and he said yes. Coach Dormer acknowledged the lack of communication at the beginning of the season but was not aware that certain players were left out. He said that he specifically remembered having conversations with the captains during pre-season about including practice players in all team activities. However, because practice players were left out of team activities in the beginning, I do not believe that message was made clear to the captains and the rest of the team until after the season started.

This lack of clarity caused a lot of unnecessary stress and angst for these young players and those feelings unfortunately continued throughout the season. I do think clear communication about the role and expectations of each group would have resolved a lot of the

concerns raised by players and families, especially since swing players had not been used in the past. Although the coaches had the benefit of the spreadsheet, it was never shared with players or families; people were unclear about who was in which group and what that meant, resulting in confusion and distress. Parents were just as confused as the players too. One parent said he spoke with Coach Dormer early in the season and walked away from the conversation thinking his daughter was on JV but she was actually on JV2. Publishing a roster, clear written communication, or even a team meeting⁵ explaining the roles may have resolved these issues.

Unfortunately, the players and families felt the divide amongst varsity players, practice players, and swing players throughout the season. Coach Dormer told this Investigator multiple times that while I was characterizing them as “practice players” during our interview, they were not considered practice players during the season because they were part of the team and “the term practice player really went away.” This may have been true for Coach Dormer, but the term practice player was repeatedly brought up during my interviews with players, families, and assistant coaches, so I do not believe everyone shared the same view as Coach Dormer.

The awareness of this division amongst the different players carried on throughout the season and had a negative emotional and psychological impact on some of the players. Practice players were reportedly treated differently from the varsity players even though they were part of the team. For example, the practice players did not receive uniforms when the rest of the team did. The core varsity girls received their uniforms first, and then the swing players received their uniforms (before the practice players). When it came time for the practice players to get their uniforms, there were not enough left.

_____.” According to Coach Dormer and the assistant coaches, there was a uniform shortage due to the number of players in the program. While that may have been true, the lack of uniforms for the practice players caused them to feel excluded from the rest of the team.

When this Investigator spoke with Coach Dormer about the concerns with uniforms, he confirmed that there is seniority with picking uniforms, which makes sense and is common practice. However, if that were true, then the practice players (which consisted of juniors and seniors) should have been able to pick their uniforms before the swing players (which consisted of mostly freshmen). He did not recall swing players getting uniforms before practice players and was unaware of the impact that decision had on players. He stated he recalls being more concerned about having enough uniforms for all players in the program, and I found this concern to be genuine (one of the assistant coaches confirmed this as well). While the order in which

⁵ A varsity team meeting was initially scheduled at the beginning of the season and would have been an opportunity to share this information with players and families, but that meeting was canceled by Coach Dormer and never rescheduled.

players are assigned uniforms may not have been a priority for the coaches, this decision impacted the practice players and how they felt about their role on the team. Even though these girls knew they were not going to get much playing time, they were told they were going to be part of the varsity team. One parent said “they never recuperated from this because of the divide it created.” Not getting a uniform caused them to feel like they were not on the team and created a divide amongst them and the other varsity players. In addition, having swing players get a varsity uniform before they did created a divide amongst them and the swing players.

One of the assistant coaches stated that the order uniforms were given made sense because the practice players “should have been cut” and “were told they were not going to get playing time.” This message was not communicated to the players, however, [REDACTED] player stated that she agreed to be [REDACTED] and was determined that if she worked hard enough, she would earn playing time on varsity. If the expectation of the coaches was that these girls would not play at all during the season, that should have been communicated to them. Otherwise, this group of girls had false expectations right from the beginning of what their role was on the team and what opportunities they may have to play in games during the season.

In addition to the uniform concerns described for practice players, there were other concerns for the swing players and the JV team that also caused feelings of animosity and divisiveness amongst them. Varsity and JV have different uniforms, and the swing players were only given a varsity uniform. When they played in JV games, their uniform was different from their teammates, causing tension between the swing players and the JV players.⁶

Right from the beginning of the season, the swing players were going to varsity games and practicing with varsity, not JV.⁷ As a result, the JV players were not including the swing players in team activities because it was unclear if they were even on the JV team. The varsity players were also not including them in varsity team activities because they were not technically on the varsity team either. It was described as extremely disorganized and the players “suffered” because of that.

As the season went on, practice players continued to feel ostracized from the varsity team in practices and games. The practice players felt - and other players confirmed this - that they were separated from the varsity team at practice and were playing on a different part of the field and in different color practice shirts. It was described as an “obvious divide.” One player said she felt “ostracized” from the rest of the team during practice because they were in a separate corner of the field. A couple of practice players approached Coach Dormer about this during the season saying they were upset that they were not practicing with the varsity players, so it was clearly

⁶ A simple solution to this would have been to give the swing players a varsity uniform when they were called up to varsity games.

⁷ A few weeks into the season, Coach Dormer changed this and had the swing players play in JV games unless called up to varsity. They still, however, only practiced with varsity.

impacting them. When asked about this separation, both assistant coaches said that players were often split up into offense and defense and then other players would rotate through. One of the assistant coaches said for 75% of the practice they were all playing together and the remaining 25% they might have been separated. Coach Dormer said that sometimes the practice players played separately and “there is absolutely nothing wrong with that.” He then went on to say that it may be separate for certain aspects of practice but not for the majority of it and they were not “segregated out.” One assistant coach said that as the season went on and they got closer to playoffs, there was more of a shift to practicing separately and it was “much more separated.”

Another example of continued divisiveness occurred at the very end of the season. The day before the playoff game, there was a discussion amongst the coaches and the players at practice about the number of players going to the game and if there would be enough room for everyone on the bus. It was reported that Coach Dormer asked [REDACTED] players to go and count the seats on the bus. He then announced at practice that starters would get their own seat on the bus on the way to the game and everyone else would have to double or triple up in the remaining seats. That evening, the captains sent out a message to the team saying that starters should arrive early so they can get on the bus first and get their own seat. One assistant coach shared that he did this because he was “trying to protect the varsity players and get them prepared for the game.” The other assistant coach shared that he said “people who are starting should get their own seat so they could be more comfortable.” Neither assistant coach mentioned that this directive was a joke, however. In my conversation with Coach Dormer, he said that it was a joke and that “some kids got it and some didn’t.” I did not find any evidence that others interpreted this as a joke.

The day of the game, one player [REDACTED] saying she no longer wanted to go to the game because she was embarrassed since [REDACTED] have to sit with younger players on the bus who were not even on varsity.⁸ Another player was texting her mother saying she did not want to go. The directive that she had to double or triple up made her feel excluded and inferior to those who would have their own seat. The staff member notified Mr. Ceglarski that players and families were upset about this and asked that he intervene. Coach Dormer informed Mr. Ceglarski it was a joke. However, that message was still not passed along to the players. In my conversations with Coach Dormer and Mr. Ceglarski, they both focused on the fact that there were enough seats on the bus so it would not have been an issue. Neither seemed to understand the underlying message that was sent to the players. The concern raised by families and players was not about the number of players or seats on the bus. Instead, the concern was that this message continued to create a divide amongst the players and made players feel excluded. As one parent put it, “everyone on the team earned their spot on the bus.” During our interview, Coach Dormer asked me “What happens if I do tell the starters they get their own seat?” which continued to suggest to me that he did not see the bigger picture of

⁸ Select players from JV and JV2 were invited to dress for the game.

how these players were interpreting that directive and how it made them feel. The team includes the whole team, not just the starting players. This incident, among others, caused players to feel excluded and did not encourage an inclusive environment for everyone on the team.

While I do not believe Coach Dormer intended for players to be impacted by the lack of communication and expectations around each player's role within the program, I have concluded that this did have a negative emotional and psychological impact on several players. It also set the stage for these players to feel excluded from the team for the rest of the season, up to and including the last game of the season. I found those I interviewed to be credible in their description of how this made them feel. Coach Dormer was adamant that the confusion and chaos at the beginning of the season was resolved within the first few weeks of September when an additional coach was hired, but players' feelings of divisiveness continued throughout the season and emotionally and psychologically impacted them.

I think it is important for consideration to be made to the fact that these players are 14-17 year olds and may interpret or perceive things differently than an adult would. That is not intended to discredit their feelings in any way, because I do find their emotions to be genuine, but it is instead meant to remind adults of that fact when working with and communicating with them.

b. General Communication with Players

Another concern that continued to come up during my interviews was Coach Dormer's communication style and how he speaks with players. I found that these young players often perceived what he said or what he did differently than what he intended to say or do. For example, several people explained that he often uses humor when conversing. While his humor may be understood by some, it was often misinterpreted by others, especially young teenagers.

An example of this happened last season when one player asked him what she could do to improve her game. He scheduled a time to meet with her and she was expecting him to focus on her soccer skills and share drills she could practice to improve her game. Instead, he told her she should smile more. This player described how much this comment got in her head and soon she was focusing on how to "coordinate every laugh, smile and conversation" at practices and games so he would notice. She said that she noticed herself "focusing less on improving my skills and my understanding of the game and more on having my coach's ideal personality." The message this statement sent to this young female athlete had such an impact on her [REDACTED]. When I asked Coach Dormer if he ever said this to a player in response to her asking how she can improve, he said no. When I asked the assistant coach if she heard this, she said no but quickly said "that is his sense of humor." She said that he will often start with a joke and then go into actual details with a player. During our interview, Coach Dormer also made

several references to using humor in his communication with players, even stating that he will often make fun of himself at practices. This Investigator also witnessed firsthand his use of humor in conversation, so it is definitely part of his communication style.

Another situation where his words were misinterpreted was described when he and one of the assistant coaches met with a player who had raised concerns about not feeling like she had a role on the team because [REDACTED]. During their conversation, Coach Dormer told her that she was a strong player and could play [REDACTED]. While he meant this as a joke, the player did not take it that way and went home crying. In her mind, she worked up the courage to discuss her feelings with her coach and he made her feel “even less important” [REDACTED]. The assistant coach shared that he will often “crack a joke” when he is uncomfortable. Unfortunately, his jokes are sometimes misinterpreted.

[REDACTED] When asked about this, Coach Dormer stated that he does not think he ever said that and then said maybe he said it sarcastically but not maliciously. This player went home crying to her parents because she was so hurt and embarrassed that he [REDACTED]. This is another situation where he may have intended this as a joke but this certain player felt humiliated and hurt by it.

[REDACTED] When she told him that she was leaving, he asked loudly in front of the team, [REDACTED]. Although he was joking when he said this, it was inappropriate and the player was “mortified” that he asked that in front of her teammates.

A parent shared that Coach Dormer would make comments to her daughter, “like banter,” but it would make her uncomfortable. He would do it in a joking manner but “what he said made her stand out” and she did not like that.

Coach Dormer may not recognize the impact he has on his players. While he may think he is joking and saying things that are funny, players on the receiving end of his jokes found them to be embarrassing and offensive. A coach’s role is to build his players up, not knock them down - even if done so unintentionally. It was obvious players sought Coach Dormer’s approval and their own self-image and confidence was directly tied to his words. His understanding of the magnitude his words have on his players is crucial to creating positive relationships with them and more importantly, them building their own self-confidence - not only in soccer - but in all aspects of their lives.

B. Bullying

With respect to claims of bullying, several players and families described words or actions by Coach Dormer that they perceived to be bullying. One player shared that he would make repeated, targeted comments to her about [REDACTED] her to be uncomfortable and humiliated in front of her teammates. For example, [REDACTED] he would make comments about that to her in front of the team. If she was [REDACTED] he would make comments about that. Her parents noted that she would come home from practice crying most nights because of this. Interestingly, in my conversation with Coach Dormer, he made several unsolicited statements about a player on the team who [REDACTED]. In what was meant to be a positive example of his support for this player, his repeated statements to me about this player - one who we were not even discussing - suggest that he is capable of making repeated comments about a player's [REDACTED] without realizing the unintentional consequences of his words.

Another player I spoke with [REDACTED] and discussed his mistreatment of her teammates. She specifically stated that she was well-liked by him and not the target of his comments, but she witnessed him singling out and making negative comments to her teammates; she felt like she had to speak up on their behalf. When asked about singling kids out, Coach Dormer said that he may have done it “joking” but not maliciously. He did say that he would correct players who were having a hard time sitting still or in the game, but “the word targeting should not be used” because he likes all the kids and there is not one player on the team that he would target.⁹

There is a difference between what is considered ‘tough coaching’ and making targeted comments to a player with no instructional value. Instead of helping the player understand what she is doing wrong and providing constructive feedback so she can improve, it was described that Coach Dormer would make repeated comments or “little digs” at players instead, often calling them out in front of others. For example, it was reported that at one practice he asked all the forwards on the team to raise their hands. Then he asked all the forwards who have not scored to keep their hands raised, singling out those players. [REDACTED] When I asked about this incident, Coach Dormer emphatically denied doing this and asked “where did they come up with this” putting his head down.

Another theme that was shared was that he would instill fear in players with comments he made, instead of instilling confidence and motivation. For example, it was reported he would tell a player he was going to bench her if she did not score or that he was going to put a JV player in

⁹ A few families mentioned that he would target certain players who were considered heavier or overweight but no one I spoke with said this happened to them directly. Coach Dormer adamantly denied this and was genuinely upset that this was raised as a concern, so I do not believe this to be true.

over her if she did not play a certain way. Coach Dormer denied this. One of the assistant coaches said she does not remember hearing him say that. The other assistant coach thought maybe it was misinterpreted and that he might say “if you’re not hustling, someone else will play,” which she believes is “an ok thing to say as a coach.” However, players interpreted this as making threats and creating an environment of fear where several players were “afraid” of his reaction if they made a mistake.

Players described that he had his “favorite players” and it is obvious who those players are. If you are not his favorite, you would be ignored or he would make negative comments to you. One player shared that he would purposefully ignore players, and although he did not do it to her because she was “one of his favorites,” she witnessed him do it to others. Coach Dormer denied doing this. One player shared that she counted at the beginning of the season how many games would go by before he gave her any positive feedback. Another player shared that her teammates and assistant coaches were recognizing her accomplishments but that she was not receiving any positive feedback or praise from “the one person who mattered.” One of the assistant coaches stated that she thought all of the coaching staff could have done a better job encouraging the players this season. Throughout my conversations with Coach Dormer, it appeared to me that he may not understand the emotional and psychological impact that he has on these players and how they rely on him to help build their own self-confidence. Young players are so impressionable and often crave the approval and praise of adults around them, especially those in a leadership role. I do not think Coach Dormer recognizes the importance of this.

Some players and families discussed the psychological impact his statements had on them. They described him making “empty promises” to them and other ways he would play “mind games” with them. Examples of this included:

- He would ask players to call out who they should be playing over when they brought up concerns about playing time. One of the assistant coaches admitted to this but denied that it happened in front of the group and was only done in private conversations with the player.
- A group of four girls were called up to the varsity tryouts, and at the end of tryouts, they were told they did not make it and would be on JV. Coach Dormer told them they would have a “big role on JV and would be named the captains.” [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] One parent said “He doesn’t think and doesn’t know how these things affect teenage girls.” Coach Dormer did not recall this situation.
- One player said “He very clearly got my hopes up about things that were not true. He told me I was going to get a chance and I didn’t.”
- [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- One parent said “he tells people what they want to hear” and “he never does what he says he is going to do.”
 - He promised one player she would get into a game (she typically does not play that much). During the game, he put her in for less than a minute and when he took her out he said, “See, I gave you a chance.” He then said, “stay focused because I’m putting you back in.” He never put her back in.
 - He would make repeated comments to players in front of others about weaknesses in their game causing players to feel belittled and embarrassed. Multiple parents described this and shared that their daughters came home crying after practices and games because of it. [REDACTED] and her parents said “he created a culture that really screwed with her mental health.” Another family said it was “emotionally draining” for her and there was “barely a night that went by for weeks where she wasn’t crying about something related to soccer.”
 - He would move certain players back and forth between the “good group” and the “bad group” at practice and it would “mess with their confidence.”¹⁰
 - After the last game of the season, one player said to her parents: “I’m glad this is over and I am not sure I want to do it again next year.” Her parents said she has played soccer her whole life but this season “really broke her. She was very sad, depressed, and upset.”
 - A parent reported that some of the girls were crying at the end of the season, and her daughter said “I really wanted to cry but I have nothing left because I’ve cried so much this season.”
 - Another parent reported that his daughter walked off the field crying and said “I hate him, I hate him so much.” She was not crying about soccer being over but was crying about Coach Dormer.
 - One parent shared that “he doesn’t care about their mental well-being with the dynamic he created amongst them.”
 - [REDACTED] was promised that she would get playing time in the final game of the season. She had her hopes up that she would get into the game and said “he promised me because [REDACTED]” She was crushed when he did not play her. Coach Dormer denied this and said he would never say that in a playoff game. He said he did say it during the regular season and there were times where he did not play someone after he said he would, but he always tried to circle back with them after the game to talk about it.
 - One parent said “there are certain players on the team, [REDACTED] that he does not hold to the same standards as others. He chooses favorites, pitting the players against each other- favorites vs. non-favorites.”

¹⁰ The groups at practice were previously discussed and Coach Dormer described it as “rotating players through” the different drills. However, because of the divide discussed above and the lack of clarity around the different groups, this caused psychological harm to players who were moved from the perceived better group to the other group.

- Several parents shared that Coach Dormer has had multiple conversations with them about plans he has for their daughter - whether it is making varsity or playing a certain position, or becoming captain - and he reportedly does not follow through on those plans.

Players reported his verbal statements had a profound psychological impact on them. One player was “physically ill” as a result and [REDACTED]. Another player was [REDACTED]. One player quit before her senior year saying Coach Dormer “made me so unhappy and anxious.” She said multiple players approached her this season telling her that they were “jealous” of her because she quit.

Coach Dormer explained that because of different club soccer teams, high school is often the first time a player is not the best player on the team or it is the first time in a player’s career where she may not get a lot of playing time. He believes this contributed to the negative feelings that players had. However, the players and families I spoke with were not complaining about playing time or certain positions; instead, they were talking about the negative environment within the soccer program itself.

C. Retaliation

Retaliation was described by players and families in different ways. First, every family I spoke with discussed fear of coming forward due to potential retaliation against their daughter. Many spoke of the fact that their daughter did not want to be involved in the investigation because she was scared she would be retaliated against in future soccer seasons. Early on in the investigation it was clear to me that families were being cautious with the information they were sharing because they did not want their daughter to be identified by facts specific to her situation. This was reiterated to me in every interview I had and was a genuine concern for those involved. I was also told by multiple families that there are other families with stories to share but they were too scared to come forward.

Players also described experiences with retaliation after they sought out feedback from Coach Dormer and then felt that he treated them differently. Specifically, they stated they would be ignored, called out in front of the team, or not receive playing time following conversations with him. Some examples include:

- One player’s parents met with Coach Dormer about concerns they had related to their daughter. Coach Dormer was supposed to follow up with the player after the meeting and speak to her to help clear things up. During practice, [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] She felt singled out and embarrassed because he was not discreet in front of the other players.

- One player shared that in a group huddle he said “The girls who are keeping their mouths shut are the ones who are playing.” Coach Dormer denied saying this and the assistant coaches said they never heard him say that.
- One parent shared that her daughter spoke with him about playing time and he “shunned her” after that conversation in practices and games. Coach Dormer denied doing this.
- One parent said the girls are “deathly afraid of speaking up because he will completely ignore them and they will not ever get to play.”
- One player said she emailed him saying she was not feeling her importance on the team. The next day at practice he

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Coach Dormer remembered this exercise from last season and said he would often use cones to explain positions. He also said there were multiple players on the team with the same name but he thought he named each of them.

- There were also reports of concerning behavior from Coach Dormer after he was informed that at least one player [REDACTED] As described above, the incident where the starters were given their own seat on the bus happened after he received the letter about bullying. Another incident happened after that on their way to the playoff game. The bus stopped so players could get out and stretch their legs before getting to the field. Coach Dormer stated that he wanted the three quietest players on the team to speak up in front of the team, so he called on those players.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]¹¹ This player felt targeted by him when he called on her because she is not one of the quietest players on the team. One of the assistant coaches stated that this player is actually “one of the most vocal players on the team” and she was confused why he called her quiet. Another player reported that she thought he was joking because the player he called on is not quiet at all. When I asked Coach Dormer about this, he informed me that typically the captains speak when approaching the field but he wanted to hear from other people; he noted it is often powerful to hear from players who may not speak up that much. When asked specifically about naming this player as one of the quietest, he could not remember if he called on her but he named other players that he did call on. He then said this player is “far from one of the quietest players on the team” and is a “one of the best communicators on the field” so he did not

¹¹ One family told me they raised concerns to Mr. Ceglarski on several occasions about Coach Dormer and were told by Mr. Ceglarski that he was going to hire a coaching consultant to help Coach Dormer with some of the issues raised. Mr. Ceglarski informed this Investigator that it was intended for the whole athletic program but it ended up being too expensive so it never happened.

think he would have said that about her. This player felt targeted and [REDACTED]

- At the beginning of the season, Coach Dormer canceled a previously scheduled meeting with the varsity players and parents. When I asked him why it was canceled, he said he was “hesitant to talk because [he] didn’t want to talk in front of” a particular family that had recently raised concerns about him to Principal Bauer and Mr. Ceglarski. He said that issues with this particular family started coming out so he decided not to have the meeting. Even if true, this decision was made in direct response to one particular family’s advocacy for their daughter and adversely impacted the rest of the team.

Lessons learned on the athletic field follow young athletes into all different parts of their life beyond high school. Self-advocacy is one of the most important lessons that a young teenage girl can learn. It is a life-long tool that can benefit her in all aspects of her life: education, professional, personal, and athletic. Fostering an environment where young females are taught to speak up for themselves should be one of the goals of any high school coach. I do not believe that environment existed for a lot of players.

V. FINDINGS

This specific complaint was filed pursuant to M.G.L. ch. 71, §37O, which is the Massachusetts state bullying law. In order to substantiate a claim or claims of bullying, I would have to find that Coach Dormer engaged in “the repeated use... of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that:

- (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property;
- (ii) places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property;
- (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the victim;
- (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or
- (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.¹²

I spent a lot of time speaking with Coach Dormer during my investigation and found him to be an engaged coach who cares about the players and the soccer program. He constantly shared that he enjoys being a coach because he likes the kids on his team and has a lot of fun

¹² It was discovered in this investigation that the high school coaches do not receive separate training on bullying and retaliation. Annual training for all school staff, including coaches, is required pursuant to M.G.L. ch. 71, §37O.

with them. In my conversations with both assistant coaches, they were genuinely surprised about the allegations made against him. One described him as “one of the nicest, most caring people I have ever worked with” and stated that his “intentions are extremely genuine.” The other said he is a “really good guy and cares a lot.” She said she knows how hard he works and is “shocked” that people are making these allegations against him. I did not find evidence of Coach Dormer maliciously trying to hurt any of his players. Instead, I believe he does not realize the impact he has on his players and how his actions or words are interpreted by them. The assistant coaches described girls laughing and smiling at practice, and I saw a video of happy girls singing along to a popular song on the bus on the way home from a game. I have no doubt that there are current and former players who think Coach Dormer is a great coach and have no issues with him.

Having said that, I believe the players (and their families) when they describe the way his words or actions negatively impacted them. While I did not find evidence of him *intentionally* targeting players, I do believe that players felt targeted by him. It would be impossible for me to substantiate or unsubstantiate every comment that Coach Dormer was accused of making. What I was able to substantiate, however, was that several players were emotionally and psychologically impacted by his words and actions throughout the season, such that it created a hostile environment for them. His lack of communication with his players led to a lot of unnecessary stress and anxiety for players, so much so that some were physically ill because of it. His use of sarcasm and humor embarrassed certain players. His repeated comments about a player's skills made her uncomfortable and self-conscious. His empty promises impacted players emotionally and psychologically. Girls believed they could not bring forward concerns to him without being retaliated against. After hours of speaking with players and families, I found these reactions to be genuine.

As a result, I found that Coach Dormer's words and actions, although not intentional, (1) caused emotional harm to certain players, and (2) created a hostile environment for certain players. The bullying statute does not include language about the intent of the alleged aggressor; instead it focuses on the impact the words or actions have on the victim. As a result, I was able to substantiate claims of bullying by Coach Dormer against some of his players.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The current structure of the program does not support inclusivity of all players and it does not support self-advocacy. It is this Investigator's recommendation that there be a significant shift in the culture of the program so this group of young women will graduate from Marblehead High School with a more positive athletic experience. This is not about playing time; instead, this is about every player benefiting from their own individual experience on the team. This Investigator is a huge believer in the value of high school sports and the positive impact it can have on a person's life, far beyond their time in high school. So many life-long lessons can be

learned through high school sports: perseverance, self-advocacy, leadership, self-confidence, being a good teammate, etc. The players I spoke with and the daughters of the parents I spoke with are not learning those valuable lessons within the current structure of the program. As a result, the recommendation for the MHS administration is to focus on creating a program that emphasizes not only athletic skills but also the importance of life-long skills that will stay with these young women far beyond their time on the soccer field.

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