Parents and Community Members-

I wanted to take a moment to address fan conduct at sporting events. I am always hesitant to send out a "blanket statement" like this because so many fans act so well, but as you will see I am calling on everyone to help ensure we create a supportive and appropriate atmosphere at our athletic contests.

Being a spectator and a fan means that you are there to watch the game and cheer on our teams. You are not a coach, so do not talk to your sons or daughters on the field or court and try to instruct them on what to do. Nor are you an official, so do not try to call the game from the stands. If you want to coach, talk to me as we typically have positions open and are always willing to accept volunteers. If you want to officiate, please contact me and I will get you in touch with the SDHSAA about what you can do to become certified.

I'm sure a lot of you can probably guess that this is being sent in reference/reaction to Friday night's game vs. Deubrook, when our crowd most definitely crossed the line of appropriate conduct. Let me make something very clear: my sending of this email is in no way an indication that I am supporting the officials or their actions. Our football coaching staff and myself as AD are sending a laundry list of concerns to the SDHSAA about the officials' conduct, professionalism, and actions. Among this are numerous personal fouls on our student-athletes that were just flat-out incorrect calls that painted our young men in a terrible and inaccurate light, as the video we are sending to the SDHSAA shows. When it comes to poor and/or biased officiating, this is the way to go about righting any wrongs done by officials - the school will make a report, send it to the state with video clips, and request to not have that crew again. That is the way to handle 'bad' officiating. Poor and/or biased officiating is absolutely no excuse for any yelling at officials. There is absolutely no excuse for yelling at officials, players, or coaches during contests. I've talked to numerous officials in my life in different sports and at different levels, not one official has ever changed a call because of what I said. A crowd riding officials does nothing to help calm the situation; in fact, it just exacerbates it.

I'm not expecting our fans to not ever say anything about the officiating, because I know it is easy to get wrapped up in the heat of the moment and yell something like "HOLDING!" or "COME ON REF!" Truthfully, it would be hypocritical of me or anyone to condemn those 'minor' actions - I've done it myself as I'm sure everyone has at some level. However, that is the extent of what should be said, and it should stop immediately when you realize you've done it. As I've told every player I've coached and every student I've taught - control the things you can control. We cannot control the officials' calls, we can control how we react to the call and we can control our actions going forward.

So, here is my expectation and my request for help from this point on. First, my primary expectation is that the only voice in the gym or on the field that officials should hear is that of the head coach, and the only voices of direction the players should hear about what to do are those of the head coach or his/her assistant coaches. To be blunt, that is the way it needs to be. I'm requesting our entire fan base's help in ensuring this is what happens. We talked at the
EAC meeting last night, I'll talk at the Booster Club meeting tonight, and I'm asking for everyone's help right now. Let's develop a "See Something Say Something" approach that is used to combat numerous issues throughout our world. If you see a fan acting unruly or trying to talk directly to an official or player, say something to them about their actions. I really believe a lot of fans (all over the world, not just here) get so wrapped up in the moment that they don't even realize what they are doing or when they are stepping out of line. Call attention to their actions being out of line; odds are if they get called out on it by another community member, they will realize what they are doing and stop. I know it works, because I've heard numerous people tell me about a fan of ours who said something to our fans in Lake Preston when they were arguing with the officials, and the fans stopped. The old adage "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem" comes in to play here. We have a problem, so we need everyone to be part of the solution.

One of the things I admire and truly love most about this community is its passion. You don't keep a small Catholic school in a small town going for over 100 years without a deep burning passion for and love of the school. I'm continuously amazed by what our community is willing to do to help and support St. Mary, our school, and our athletic programs. The last thing I want to do is calm that passion, because it is what fuels everything we do, and we would not be where we are today without it. There is a tremendous amount of passion and pride in Dell Rapids St. Mary that runs through this entire community, from the Kindergarten students learning about what it means to be a Cardinal to the grandparents and great-grandparents watching 4th and possibly even 5th generations of their family attend DRSM. We need to make sure that we direct all that passion, love, and pride in a positive way to everything we do as a school community.

Thank You and God Bless,

Casey Michel
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