

Parents want pair reinstated

2 suspended from SR team

By KRIS MILLER
Eagle Staff Writer

SLIPPERY ROCK — An appeal to the Slippery Rock School Board Monday night went unanswered when parents asked for their sons to be reinstated to the Slippery Rock High School varsity basketball team.

Parents Daniel Shearer and Elaine Kelly asked board members to rescind a recent decision by high school Principal Harry Beil. He suspended their sons for the rest of the season because they received citations from the state police for underage drinking, Shearer said.

The boys, Matthew Shearer and Brian Kelly, also were suspended from school for three days, said Shearer.

Both boys have participated in basketball for four years, and the punishment is too harsh, said Shearer.

The boys went to a party in Grove City about a week ago where the state police responded, said Shearer. No parents were home and police reported alcohol was present.

Daniel Shearer read portions of school policies that state students found with alcohol at "school sponsored events" will be suspended.

"No policy is in place if a student is given a citation at a nonschool-sponsored activity," he said. The drug and alcohol policy also states students found guilty of offenses will be suspended.

Standoff

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been in the three-bedroom home.

"I've never seen so many troopers, even this past summer," said one neighbor, referring to a bomb scare on West Penn Avenue in August.

By midnight, more than 15 police cars, most of them unmarked, and about 40 police officers were on the scene.

State police SERT officers arrived about midnight, wearing combat fatigues and carrying automatic rifles.

Police closed Miller Avenue and portions of West Penn and West Brady streets. They also evacuated people in homes nearest to 331 Miller Ave.

Police tried to contact the man using a megaphone. An unidentified woman spoke on the megaphone, asking the barricaded man to call her or the police.

At 1:40 a.m., police used "flashbangs," devices which cause a loud, bright explosion to disorient a person. Police detonated more flashbangs five minutes later, and again at 2:10 a.m. and 4:30 a.m.

A pair of muffled shots sounded at 2:45 a.m. and again at 3 a.m. The noises were tear gas being deployed, said Officer Ben Spangler of the city police.

The SERT officers about 5 a.m. decided to go inside. The officers found the house unoccupied, police said. The area was declared safe at 5:07 a.m.,

Vending

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on a property and somebody fills it," said DEA Special Agent Jose Martinez. "Once we find out where it's at, we'll look into it and see if they're violating laws."

At least three dispensaries in the city, including two belonging to Mehdi-zadeh, have installed vending machines to distribute the drug to people who carry cards authorizing marijuana use.

Mehdi-zadeh said he spent seven months to develop and patent the black, armored box, which he calls the "PVM," or prescription vending machine.

A sliding fence protects the tinted windows of his dispensary, barely distinguishing it from a busy thoroughfare of strip malls, automobile dealers and furniture shops. A box resembling a large refrigerator stands inside the nearly empty shop, near a few shelves stocked with vitamins and herbs.

"There's no mention of citations alleging the use of alcohol," he said. "This is clearly discrimination against the athletes. It's our legal right to have a hearing before a district justice. He can determine innocence or guilt."

The two boys plan to plead not guilty, according to Shearer.

Kelly, who has been involved with the basketball boosters through the years, said the boys have "given their heart and soul to improve their games."

"I feel as a parent, the school has passed judgment before it is due," she said.

Gerald Cassady, the lawyer representing Shearer and Kelly, urged the board to decide on behalf of the parents until a "full, fair, fact finding is done."

"This is a potentially life-changing event for these boys and affects their eligibility for scholarships," he said.

Board members didn't respond to the request Monday, though they had a two-hour executive session in the middle of the meeting.

After the meeting, board solicitor Tom King said board members can't discuss disciplinary matters. Issues like the one described are usually handled by the principal and athletic director, he said.

Basketball players sign a statement agreeing not to use drugs or alcohol, he said, or they risk suspension. Such suspensions usually last for 20 percent of the games, or in this case, the last five games of the season.

the release said.

A police officer at the city station this morning wasn't talking about what happened. He only said everyone was safe and the standoff had been resolved.

At 5:55 a.m., a county dispatcher issued a "be on the lookout" advisory for all police departments for the man who had been the target of the standoff.

A description of the suspect was provided, as well as the warning that he was "believed to be armed and suicidal." The man possibly had a handgun.

At 6:30 a.m., another call reported the suspect had been located at the Fairfield Inn.

A pair of clerks at the hotel were curious about the circumstances but they, too, seemed confused by what happened.

One clerk said a city officer showed up not long after 6 a.m. asking about the suspect. The clerks said the man had paid for a room about 11 p.m. Tuesday.

"He must have stayed in his room all night," said one clerk. "No one saw him after he checked in."

Hotel workers admitted they were surprised to see the city officer show up before dawn, and they asked the clerks to evacuate the rooms, about 10 of which were occupied.

Several additional Butler officers arrived and went to the man's room, where he was arrested and taken away in a Butler ambulance.

A guard in a black T-shirt emblazoned with the word "Security" on the front stands at the door. A poster of Bob Marley decorates a back room.

The computerized machine requires fingerprint identification and a prepaid card with a magnetic stripe. Once the card and fingerprint are verified, a bright green envelope with the pot drops down a slot.

Mehdi-zadeh says any user approved for medical marijuana and registered in a computer database at his dispensaries can pre-purchase the drug and then use the machine to pick up.

The process provides convenience and privacy for users who may otherwise feel uncomfortable about buying marijuana, Mehdi-zadeh said.

At the Timothy Leary Medical Dispensary in the San Fernando Valley, the vending machine is accessible only during business hours.

Run-in on Sawmill Run Road



DAVE PRELOSKY/BUTLER EAGLE

A towing service worker prepares his flatbed to haul an SUV involved in a head-on collision on Sawmill Run Road near Cypress Street in the Meridian section of Butler Township at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday. No one was seriously hurt when Melissa Merckle, 27, of Sterling, Ohio, driving a

Chevy Equinox, turned onto Sawmill Run Road from Cypress Street and hit a Ford pickup truck driven by Corbett Stewart, 66, of North Breeze-wood Drive, according to Butler Township police. Merckle had a minor injury to her hand, and Stewart was not injured.

Mother

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before hitting a utility pole.

Kerr-Barnhart, just months from graduating at Butler High School, died of head injuries.

Toxicology tests later determined his blood-alcohol level was 0.084 percent at the time of the crash. A level of 0.08 percent is considered intoxicated under state law.

Shuler, who Kerr-Barnhart had reportedly visited that evening, pleaded guilty to two counts of selling or furnishing liquor to minors.

He was sentenced Jan. 24 by Butler County Judge Timothy McCune to join the county's Intermediate Punishment Program.

After the sentencing, Shuler's defense attorney Joe Kecksemethy said, "It's tragic that these things sometimes happen when young men act irresponsibly, and Judge McCune was correct in pointing out that Mr. Shuler will always deeply feel the loss of his friend and regret the pain that his family must also feel."

In fashioning Shuler's punishment, the judge also took into consideration Shuler's guilty plea to theft and aggravated assault while drunk driving in an unrelated 2007 case.

In all, Shuler was ordered to spend 66 months in the IP program, which is generally a mix

of punishment offered to first-time and non-violent offenders.

In Shuler's case, the judge decided the first three months of the IP program should be spent in the county prison with work release.

The second three months are to be served on house arrest with electronic monitoring. And the rest of the program is to be spent on probation.

Shuler also must log in 100 hours of community service and take a turn on the county's litter pick-up crew.

Kerr said, initially, after her son's death she mourned as best she knew how.

She joined counseling groups.

She questioned the details she was given.

She filed a lawsuit. But the legal process further confused and saddened her, and Kerr said she took her concerns to the cemetery where she spoke to her son: "I know you did not mean for this to happen. Send me a sign if you want me to stop this lawsuit."

She begged her son for guidance, then went home to find the yard full of turkeys.

"I was so excited to see them," Kerr said, noting it was the only time ever that a flock of wild birds came that close to her home, then in Fenelton.

Tax

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who would otherwise be on track to get tax relief next year. Perzel disputed predictions his legislation would be vetoed.

"As far as the governor's concerned, if he doesn't like seniors he doesn't like seniors, I can't help that," he said.

Chuck Ardo, a spokesman for Democratic Gov. Ed Rendell, declined to comment late Tuesday.

The surprise vote followed the three-to-one defeat of a Republican-sponsored proposal to eliminate all school property taxes — including those on businesses, commercial properties and second homes — by extending the state sales tax to far more transactions and increasing the income tax.

The sponsor of that measure, Rep. Sam Rohrer, R-Berks, called it "the biggest thing this House has ever discussed."

"The school property tax is taking people to their graves, both in their spirit and their will," he said.

Perzel's plan trumped an approach sponsored by Finance Committee Chairman David Levdansky, D-Allegheny, that would have directed tax cuts to all owners of primary residences and farms.

Levdansky proposed adding a half-percentage-point to the state sales tax — to 6.5 percent from the current 6 percent — and increasing the personal income tax by 0.22 percent, to 3.29.

Late Tuesday, an angry Levdansky called it "the ex-speaker's revenge."

"If he can't be in charge, then he doesn't want us to get anything done, either," Levdansky said.

Perzel said his legislation responded to voters' and school boards' rejection in recent years of other property tax reduction schemes.

"The bottom line is, the people of Pennsylvania don't like what we've been doing," he said. "We can realistically take care of the senior homeowners — they're the ones that are most involved, most touched by these taxes."

Levdansky criticized Perzel's approach for creating a tax shelter for others by not limiting eligibility to people's primary residences or farms.

"If this amendment were to become law, I'm going to give my house to my parents," he said. "And not just me, but all property owners who pay property taxes will be encouraged to give their property to their parents if they make less than \$40,000."

Perzel's parliamentary maneuver was possible because House rules passed last year granted rank-and-file members the ability to force floor votes on amendments, a rule that was not in place when Perzel served as House majority leader and as speaker.

Campaign

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invested his heart and soul in this primary and who conducted himself with all the qualities of the exceptional American leader he truly is," McCain said. "Thank you, Rudy, for all you have added to this race and for being an inspiration to me and millions of Americans."

Giuliani hung his bid for the Republican presidential nomination on his leadership. His stalwart performance as New York mayor in the tense days after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York and Washington earned him national magazine covers, international accolades and widespread praise.

Steadfast in a crisis, as a candidate Giuliani was a bundle of contradictions, so much so that he liked to joke that even he didn't always agree with himself.

A moderate-to-liberal New Yorker who backed abortion rights, gay rights and gun control in a party dominated by Southern conservatives, Giuliani became a Republican mayor of an overwhelmingly Democratic city. Campaigning for national office, he claimed to have created the most conservative government in the most liberal city in America.

After earning a reputation as a tough-talking, even abusive executive, Giuliani the presidential candidate was mostly mild-mannered in debates, even as those around him got meaner.

Giuliani, 63, first gained prominence as a crime-busting federal prosecutor in New York City. Jailing mob bosses, Wall Street executives and corrupt politicians helped propel his next career as a politician, but it wasn't an immediate success. He lost the first time he ran for mayor in 1989 before winning in 1993.

As mayor, he fostered a take-charge image by rushing to fires and crime scenes to brief the press, but some critics felt he was more concerned about taking credit from others for what became a historic decline in the city's crime rate during his tenure.

A bout with prostate cancer and the very public breakup of his marriage with second wife Donna Hanover — she first learned he was filing for divorce when he made the announcement at a televised news conference — forced Giuliani to withdraw from a race for the U.S. Senate against Democrat Hillary Rodham Clinton in 2000. The messy divorce was revisited in awkward detail once he re-entered politics.

With no working strategy in his presidential campaign, no primary victories and dwindling resources, the mayor's third-place finish in Florida spelled the end of his run.

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