

35 Students Were Baptized on Their High School Football Field

The baptism of high school football players on the 50-yard-line in their football stadium has drawn complaints from a group that pushes for separation of church and state.

After more than two dozen Reeltown High school players were baptized on the field in November, the Wisconsin-based Freedom from Religion Foundation demanded an investigation.

“There is a strong relationship between conservative Protestantism and football at the high school and college level,” said Michael Altman, a religious studies professor at the University of Alabama.

Altman said the Wisconsin group “is doing its best to call attention to a practice it finds unconstitutional by trying to take a local story national.”

Tallapoosa County Schools Superintendent Joe Windle told that he found no wrongdoing. The baptism was not conducted by the school, he said.

Windle said he knew about the baptism, since he had spoken with Coach Matt Johnson ahead of time. He said he approved as long as it wasn’t a team requirement for everyone to attend—and that it wasn’t sponsored by a school employee.

“The coach told me it would happen and I told the coach he couldn’t be involved,” said Windle, who did not attend the baptisms. “I was asked if they could do it. I said that I had no problem with it, to be sure they get two pastors to do it and to be sure that they do it and that (Coach Johnson) stay out of it and that’s what we did.”

The issue has garnered attention in Tallapoosa County, a small county of around 41,000 residents northeast of Montgomery.

The baptisms occurred inside a tub filled with water. About 35 students asked to be baptized, Windle said. Of those, 26 were football players who requested the baptisms take place on the football field. The other students had their baptisms at their churches, Windle said.

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