

Atheists Strong-Arm Wrestling Team Over Bible Verse

Hulk Hogan once said, "I fear no man, no beast or evil, brother."

And the wrestlers at Parkersburg South High School in Parkersburg, ., fear no atheist.

The teenage grapplers are staring down the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), a Wisconsin-based atheist group outraged because the team wears T-shirts bearing a Bible verse.

"I can do all things through Him that strengthens me." That's the verse emblazoned across the back of the shirt. The motto was also posted on the team's website. Until now.

"We asked them to take it down," says Pat Law, the superintendent of the Wood County School District. "We have to follow the law—whatever that law might be. We're going to be certain that everyone's rights are being protected."

Law told me the team had been using the motto for at least 10 years without any complaint—until he received the letter from the FFRF. He says the group alleges the shirts violate the separation of church and state.

However, Bill Merriman, an attorney representing one of the wrestlers and his parents, told me the shirts are perfectly legal.

"It's not part of the official uniform," Merriman says. "If a student athlete doesn't want to wear that shirt, they don't have to. It's not a requirement. It's not part of the official uniform."

Merriman says the shirts were paid for by parents of the

wrestlers—and now those moms and dads are ready to pile-drive somebody.

“They don’t understand how somebody can come along after all these years and say you can’t wear that,” he says. “It’s frustrating for the parents because they see a lot of other T-shirts being worn by students that are certainly not religious—but they are offensive. Nobody is saying they can’t wear those shirts.”

That’s a pretty good point.

For now, Supt. Law told me the kids can wear the shirts, provided they belong to the students.

“We do not and cannot infringe upon their freedom of religion—their ability to express that,” he says.

However, the Bible verse has already been scrubbed from the wrestling team’s website.

Merriman says he is ready to file a lawsuit if the school district ultimately decides the shirts violate the law.

“The First Amendment swings both ways,” he told me.

Indeed, it does. But try telling that to a militant atheist.

It’s really no surprise the boys had a Bible verses printed on their T-shirts. As we all learned in Sunday school, the relationship between God and grapplers predates Saturday morning wrestling.

There’s a great wrestling story in the Old Testament. Jacob went toe to toe with an angel. It was an honest-to-goodness, no-holds-barred steel cage match.

Now, I’m no theologian, but I suspect if old Jacob got in the squared circle with an angel, he’d be more than willing to tangle with an atheist.

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