

Students to Lead in Prayer Before Football Game After Coach Gets Heat for Praying With Team

Students at Rockvale High School in Tennessee plan to lead their own prayer before their football game this week. That decision comes after a complaint was lodged against their football coach for praying with his team after a game on Aug. 30.

Coach Rick Rice was called on the carpet after the Freedom From Religion Foundation, supposedly in response to an anonymous parent's tip and filed a complaint with the Rutherford County, Tennessee, school system. The FFRF said Rice violated the Constitution by leading the team in prayer.

According to WTZV Fox 17, the school principal then "addressed the issue" with Rice, who apologized for any misunderstanding.

The school system issued a statement saying the issue has been resolved, adding: "Any prayers or religious activities must be student-initiated and student-led. Employees are not to lead the activities or participate other than to provide supervision."

The Daily News Journal reports in a phone conversation Monday that Rice apologized for leading the prayer and said he didn't mean to offend anyone. He said he led two prayers this season and that a student led a prayer at another game.

Prayers on the football field are not alarming at all to many in this community. News 4 reports residents say it's a long-standing tradition.

"We always prayed before games. It was just part of what we did," Rockvale resident Drew Kilgour told News 4.

"That's something that you see on the fields, that's something that you see in the locker rooms, that's something that you see in the classrooms, in small groups when it comes to any athletic sport, but especially in football, we really see that," said Ronnisha Simmons-Duke, mother of a Rockvale High School freshman.

The controversy has spurred two students to take the lead in keeping the prayers flowing and the tradition alive.

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