

Interscholastic League Hit For Harsh Bonham Ruling

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The Texas Interscholastic League is under fire for penalizing Bonham under a 20-year rule that says no athlete may receive awards costing more than \$150 a year.

Dec. 17, at the Bonham football banquet, members of the squad each received a \$2.50 religious book from a local Baptist Church. This was in addition to a \$15.00 letter sweater from the school.

Because there was nothing mercenary involved and the books were given with good intent, it was not believed that action came under the award rule.

Bonham officials could have gotten a ruling and it could have been handled satisfactorily after it was done—the League allows five days for a gift to be returned without penalty. But it was May before the interscholastic League heard about it. A clipping from a Baptist publication telling about the gift of the books was mailed anonymously to Dr. Rhea Williams, League athletic director.

The district committee could not rule on the alleged award infraction but it did handle the amateur rule that prohibits a boy receiving money of valuable consideration for his athletic endeavors. Bonham was told to return the books and was reprimanded.

The awards rule is solely under the jurisdiction of the State executive committee.

The League membership was in the awards rule a couple of decades ago with a limit of \$10.00. But it was argued that it was virtually impossible to provide a suitable award when that amount, so eight years ago it was hiked to \$15.00.

The rule was designed to make schoolboy sports strictly amateur. The schools, in voting the rule, made no provisions for exceptions. They obviously took the view that a way to weaken the rule was to allow circumvention even if a hardship might be claimed.

The colleges apparently are coming to the same way of thinking and it now seems to be a general policy of the NCAA.

Remember Texas Tech losing the basketball championship because one player was found to have needed an hour's work in the classroom—something the school rang the bell on. It was an honest mistake by Texas Tech was penalized just the same.

How technical can you get when you have a rule that allows any person to pay expenses of a prospective athlete to a Southwest Conference camp but says that he must accompany the athlete at his own expense.

The executive committee has four penalties that could be assessed against Bonham: suspension, one-year ineligibility for the players, disqualification of the school for championship contention and probation.

The executive committee chose the lightest—Bonham won't be able to compete for the championship next season although it can play its schedule and will be on probation the following two years while being allowed to try for the title.

It might appear unjust to assess penalties when the circumstances were considered but under the rules, which are supposed to be enforced without exception, the executive committee had no alternative. William said he could recall no case in which worthy intent was not cited. But no exceptions ever were made.

Had the book been given to the boys in Bonham High School or had it been given to a Sunday School class, or had the boys bought the books, there would have been no reaction. The trouble arose when the boys were given the books at a banquet honoring the football squad and they were presented as an award for athletic effort.

The League has operated successfully for 46 years by setting up rules to be enforced by the letter. The membership invoked these rules and obviously wanted them enforced on all. Intent never has been considered except as a possible alleviation of the penalty. Only the question of whether a rule was broken was the prime issue and when it was broken there was a penalty.

The public, which is generally pro minded, does not like what it thinks are penurious rules depriving boys of awards for athletic excellence. It also describes as "ridiculous" a rule that penalizes although the intent is good.

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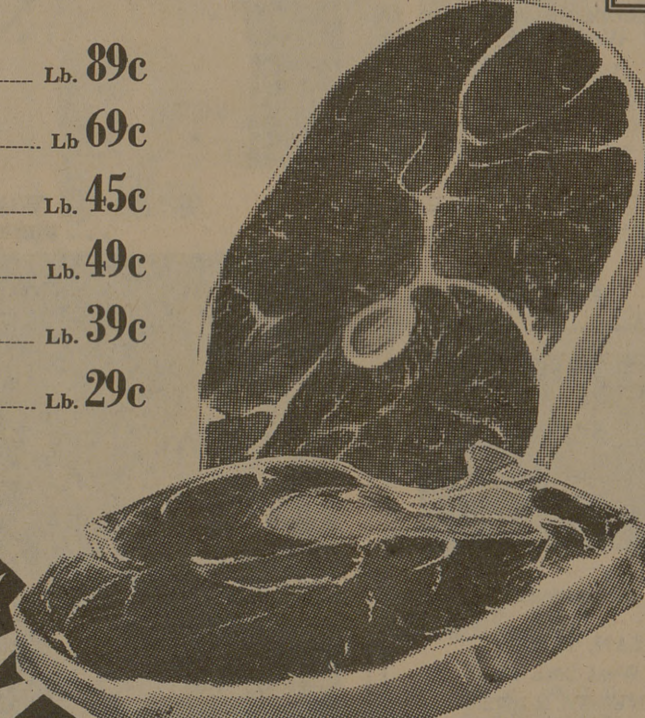
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