

A Hopeful and Disturbing Pattern in Sports Hazing: 2016

By Hank Nuwer

The years 2015-2016 have been filled with many ups and downs.



The greatest joy occurred in 2015 when it appeared there had been no death in fraternal, club or athletic hazing. This was hailed as a pivotal achievement for the thousands of activists intent on putting an end of initiation practices that range from the petty idiocies to the demeaning and dangerous.

Now in May of 2016, all activists learned a bitter truth. In reality, there had been one death in the fall semester of 2015, but this sad death at Louisiana State University had been kept under wraps by the institution. Moreover the university took two months before launching an investigation.

Beta Kappa Gamma fraternity member Praneet Karki, 22, died during an apparent case of physical hazing during an annual “retreat” in which verbal abuse, intense sessions of physical exercise, and a grueling scavenger hunt were used to “bond” new members. Karki’s autopsy report, uncovered by Station

KATC in Baton Rouge, listed the cause of his death as “arrhythmia, likely exercised induced.” A coroner said that exercise-related demands by the fraternity members did not rise to the level of any crime. The fraternity finally was kicked off the LSU campus, however, until 2021.

Other disturbing news to hazing came from the world of high school athletic hazing. In short, the continuing, disturbing trend of varsity athletes sexually hazing, intimidating and sodomizing newcomers on a team shows no sign of abating.

- o In 2016, three 17-year-old football players at Conestoga High School in Pennsylvania were charged with assault and unlawful restraint after a newcomer to the team was held down and probed in the rectum with a broom handle. A local district attorney said this act topped a long list of aggressive hazing acts required by senior players on an annual day of abuse they self-described as “No-Gay Thursday.” Media outlets reported that the Conestoga coaching staff professed to have no knowledge of such activities, despite evidence that much of the hazing took place in a locker room.

- o In January 2016, Ooltewah High School officials cancelled the basketball team’s season after at least two younger players were maliciously assaulted with objects. One victim suffered a ruptured colon and an injured bladder.

The two specific instances are part of a larger trend toward violent and sexual hazing

incidents reported at many high schools and a smattering of colleges across North America. The reports go back at least to 1982 when a Nogales, AZ baseball rookie was assaulted by older members of the team. There have been fired coaches, multimillion dollar lawsuits gone forward, and outcries of anguish and anger from dozens of parents outraged by what painful and potentially life-crippling acts that had been perpetrated on their sons.

Finally, in May of 2016, there has been a glimmer of hope that states will begin to address high school hazing in the same strict and uncompromising way that collegiate hazing has been addressed for years.

The first state legislators to call for harsh penalties in the event of high school hazing is Pennsylvania. Although misdemeanor penalties had been in place for collegiate fraternal and athletic hazing, no such equivalent was present at the secondary school level.

Now Gov. Tom Wolf vowed to sign just-passed Bill 1574 that requires schools to post a hazing policy and to allow for the imposing of tough penalties for high school hazers and their institutions alike.

Here are some other concerns that need to be addressed:

What should parents do if they learn their child has been hazed?

A letter to school principal, school superintendent, coach, athletic director, and school board--They should serve notice that the parent feels the school is not a welcoming place for their child. If necessary, retain a lawyer and get the letter out. Especially the parent needs to advise the child ways to report hazing. The child should not feel compelled to merely copy with these inane rituals.

What should parents do if they learn their child has been part of hazing someone else?

That is a tough one if it is sexual hazing or beat-ins. Then you have criminal behavior.

What can students do to prevent or stop hazing?

Turn to groups such as HazingPrevention.org and [StopHazing](http://StopHazing.org) on the Internet. They'll get tips from experts and also their peers.

How can people respond to claims that hazing is an important form of group bonding?

Torture also bonded WWII prisoners with their captors. No greater good can result from such bonding.