



Fighting for Victims. Fighting for Justice.

**Sean L. Walton**

614-636-3476 x 102

[swalton@waltonbrownlaw.com](mailto:swalton@waltonbrownlaw.com)

Good afternoon. I represent seven high school football officials who experienced a traumatic experience that no other referee should have to endure.

On September 10, 2021, the assigned crew for the rivalry game of Grove City vs Central Crossing football came prepared with a combined total of 107 years of officiating experience. Not only was their experience that night unlike anything they have ever experienced as officials, but it has prompted them to tell their story so that no other official ever has to experience anything like that night again.

That night the two high school teams played a competitive and exciting game, until late in the 4th quarter. A defensive pass interference call was made against Grove City. The coaches were upset with the call and a few of them angrily ran on the field ranting and raving. The defensive coordinator of Grove City's response forced the officials to call an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. Central Crossing, Grove City's opponent, closed the game with a victory.

While leaving the field, a Grove City Assistant Coach charged the officiating crew in a threatening manner. The refs feared for their personal safety as other coaches also became combative. The staff instructed their players to leave the field instead of shaking hands.

Unfortunately, when the referees entered their locker room to debrief, things took a far more sinister tone. They attempted to leave and discovered the locker room door was barricaded shut. It took a great amount of force by violently banging the locker room door against the vending machine to create a wedge to escape, however they were trapped for so long and in such a manner that should an emergency have commenced, they would have been trapped and faced certain death or serious injury. It was unknown at that time who moved the vending machine in front of the locker room door. However, the only people in the building near their room were the coaching staff members of Grove City's football team.

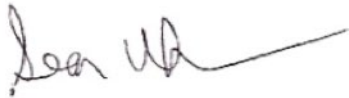
While this incident was immediately reported, no criminal charges have come from this clearly criminal act, the internal school investigation yielded no results, and 7 members of a community of individuals who sacrifice to ensure that our youth are protected, do not feel that same protection from anyone who has the ability to protect them.

Not only is this type of behavior putting current officials in danger, but we are headed to a future of high school sports with many more forfeits, cancellations, and disappointments. Since the referees, who affectionately call themselves the Soul Patrol, went public with their story, they have been encouraged by other officials who have thanked them for their courage on behalf of their colleagues. While their courage is admired, those who protect our children deserve to be able to do so with the dignity and the humanity that they so deserve.

Let us show the youth that when you commit wrongful acts, you will be held accountable no matter who you are or who you choose to attack. We are asking for legislation that protect sports officials; we are

asking for accountability when the safety of officials is placed in danger; and we are asking that officials be allowed to do what it is they love, and to officiate the sports that we so love; and to do so without fear of any retaliation.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean Walton", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sean L. Walton  
*Attorney*