

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <http://www.djreprints.com>.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204443404577052073672561402>

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

A Discipline Problem

Paterno Fought Penn State Official Over Punishment of Players



Joe Paterno is carried off the field at Penn State after his 400th win, in November 2010. ZUMAPRESS

By REED ALBERGOTTI

November 22, 2011

STATE COLLEGE, Pa.—Legendary Penn State football coach Joe Paterno clashed repeatedly with the university's former chief disciplinarian over how harshly to punish players who got into trouble, internal emails suggest, shedding new light on the school's effort to balance its reputation as a magnet for scholar-athletes with the demands of running a nationally dominant football program.

In an Aug. 12, 2005, email to Pennsylvania State University President Graham Spanier and others, Vicky Triponey, the university's standards and conduct officer, complained that Mr. Paterno believed she should have "no interest, (or business) holding our football players accountable to our community standards. The Coach is insistent he knows best how to discipline his players...and their status as a student when they commit violations of our standards should NOT be our concern...and I think he was saying we should treat football players different from other students in this regard."

The confrontations came to a head in 2007, according to one former school official, when six football players were charged by police for forcing their way into a campus apartment that April and beating up several students, one of them severely. That September, following a tense meeting with Mr. Paterno over the case, she resigned her post, saying at the time she left because of "philosophical differences."



Penn State's former chief disciplinarian, Vicky Triponey. *PENN STATE*

MORE

- [Chat: Send Us Your Questions on Paterno](#)
- [Scandals Spread With Changes in College Sports](#)

THE CAREER OF JOE PATERNO

See key events in the 46-year career of major-college football's winningest coach.



- [More photos and interactive graphics](#)

In a statement Monday, Dr. Triponey said: "There were numerous meetings and discussions about specific and pending student discipline cases that involved football players," which she said included "demands" to adjust the judicial process for football players. The end result, she said, was that football players were treated "more favorably

than other students accused of violating the community standards as defined by the student code of conduct.”

Mr. Paterno’s lawyer, Wick Sollers, said through a spokesman that “the allegations that have been described are out of context, misleading and filled with inaccuracies....Penn State’s record of producing successful student athletes under coach Paterno’s guidance is unquestioned.”

I would respectfully ask that you please do something to stop this atrocious behavior before this team and an entire generation of Penn State students leave here believing that this is appropriate and acceptable behavior within a civil university community.
email from Vicky Triponey to Penn State President Graham Spanier, September 2005

Mr. Spanier didn’t respond to requests for comment. A Penn State spokesman declined to comment.

For years, Penn State’s football program, which has won two national championships, was regarded as a model. Its players graduated at rates far above average, and it is one of only four major-conference athletic programs never to have been sanctioned for major violations by the sport’s governing body, the NCAA. In recent weeks, a sex-abuse scandal involving Jerry Sandusky, a longtime assistant coach of Mr. Paterno’s, has badly tarnished that reputation. Mr. Sandusky has said he is innocent.

RELATED VIDEO

- Penn State Prepares for Post-Paterno Era
- Joe Paterno Era Ends at Penn State

Messrs. Paterno and Spanier have been ousted from their jobs in the wake of the scandal. Athletic Director Tim Curley was indicted for perjury in the case and has been removed from his job and placed on administrative leave. Mr. Curley has denied

any wrongdoing. A representative for Mr. Curley said he had no comment on any email traffic, but that, as athletic director, he tried to make sure all student athletes were treated equally with regard to the code of conduct.

On Monday, Penn State’s Special Committee of the Board of Trustees said at a news conference in Philadelphia that former FBI director Louis Freeh will lead the investigation into the school’s handling of child sexual-abuse allegations.

Penn State, like many universities, saw its endowment swell in recent decades, to about \$1.7 billion, thanks to the contributions of loyal alumni. Sports brought in \$106.6 million in revenue in the school’s 2010 fiscal year.

RELATED DOCUMENT

Read emails related to the August 2005 meeting.

The messages I heard from Coach Paterno included the following:

- * Leave Discipline of Football players to the coach.

In his opinion we should have no interest, (or business) holding our feet. Coach is insistent he knows best how to discipline his players . . . and I standards should NOT be our concern. . . and I think he was saying we this regard.

- * Eliminate Off Campus Code

Despite evidence here and throughout all of Higher Education in the U: to lessen student violations, Coach Paterno believes we should NOT be

Students at Penn State are subject to a code of conduct administered by the office of judicial affairs—an arm of the student-affairs department. The office can open investigations of any incident on or off campus. It can order a range of punishments, including, if it sees fit, expulsion.

When Dr. Triponey arrived from the University of Connecticut in 2003 to become vice president of student affairs, she was charged with overseeing the department that enforced the code.

Just before she arrived, Penn State faced an episode in which Mr. Paterno had decided to let cornerback Anwar Phillips play in a bowl game, even though he had been charged with sexually assaulting a woman and had been temporarily expelled from school. Mr.

Paterno declined to field questions about the incident at the time. Mr. Spanier referred to it as a case of "miscommunication." Mr. Phillips was acquitted of the charge in a subsequent trial.



Joe Paterno returns to his house on Nov. 9. ZUMAPRESS

In 2004, after several incidents involving football players, Mr. Paterno told the Allentown Morning Call newspaper that the players weren't misbehaving any more than usual, but that such news was now more public. "I can go back to a couple guys in the '70s who drove me nuts," he said. "The cops would call me, and I used to put them in bed in my house and run their rear ends off the next day. Nobody knew about it. That's the way we handled it."

In the spring of 2005, Dr. Triponey's office suspended Penn State offensive lineman E.Z. Smith and a teammate for the summer after they were caught shooting arrows through an off-campus apartment wall, according to news reports at the time. In an email that August to Dr. Triponey, Penn State athletic director Curley said that Mr. Paterno was "frustrated" because Mr. Smith couldn't participate in preseason practice.

In August 2005, Mr. Spanier, the university president, suggested that Dr. Triponey meet with Mr. Paterno. Athletic director Curley, assistant athletic Director Fran Ganter and Joe Puzycki, the assistant to Dr. Triponey, also attended the Aug. 11 meeting, according to two people knowledgeable about the meeting. Mr. Paterno loudly criticized Dr. Triponey at the meeting for meddling, these people say.

The following day, Dr. Triponey sent an email to Messrs. Spanier, Curley and Puzycki summarizing the meeting and sharing her thoughts and concerns. In the email, which was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, she said that football players were getting in trouble at a "disproportionate rate" from other students, often for serious acts. She said her staff had tried to work with the athletic department, sometimes sharing information, but that whenever her department initiated an investigation into a football player, the phones lit up. "The calls and pleas from coaches, Board members, and others when we are considering a case are, indeed, putting us in a position that does treat football players differently and with greater privilege."

Dr. Triponey also wrote that Mr. Paterno believed that the school's code of conduct should not apply to any incidents that take place off campus—that those should be handled by police—and they shouldn't be allowed to affect anyone's status as a student.

"Coach Paterno would rather we NOT inform the public when a football player is found responsible for committing a serious violation of the law and/or our student code," she wrote, "despite any moral or legal obligation to do so."

Dr. Triponey ended her note by asking Mr. Curley and Mr. Spanier if these were accurate impressions of Mr. Paterno's views—and whether they shared them.

Mr. Curley's response, also reviewed by the Journal, was sent three days later and was copied to Mr. Spanier. "I think your summary is accurate," it said.

Mr. Curley, who had played for Mr. Paterno's team, explained what he said was the coach's "frustrations with the system." Mr. Paterno, he wrote, felt that "it should be his call if someone should practice and play in athletics." He said Mr. Paterno felt the school

```
>Vicky: I think your summary is accurate. I think we have two things
>that
>
>have changed that have caused Joe's frustrations with the system. The
>first is the decision four years ago to report off campus incidents and
>be changes (not sure when) of including extra curricular activities in
>penalties. In the first case he feels we have overreacted and the fact
>only one other Big Ten school went in this direction concerns him. The
>second
>
>case he feels it should be his call if someone should practice and play
>in athletics. The EE case with preseason practice really frustrated him
>and he saw no reason why he should not be allowed out for practice. I
>also feel we are seeing an overall frustration about larger issues that
>affect him.
>
>He
>thinks the NCAA has gone overboard in a number of areas that have
>caused
>
>nothing but a huge bureaucracy—the new academic requirements, initial
>eligibility, 12th game, BCS, NCAA rules on everything, etc that we have
>lost sight of what this is all about.
```

Email from then-athletic director Tim Curley to the school's then-chief disciplinarian Vicky Triponey.

had
"overreacted" by
deciding to allow
reporting of off-
campus
incidents, and
that the NCAA
had gone
"overboard" with
new rules on
academic-
eligibility
requirements.

In an email to Mr. Spanier on Sept. 1, Dr. Triponey wrote of Mr. Paterno: "I do not support the way this man is running our football program. We certainly would not tolerate this behavior in our students so I struggle with how we tolerate it in our coach."

That same fall, Dr. Triponey's office suspended Dan Connor, a Penn State linebacker, who had been accused of making harassing calls to a retired assistant coach. Shortly after the suspension was handed down, Mr. Paterno ordered the player to suit up, according to a person familiar with the matter. Dr. Triponey informed the player that if he suited up for practice, he would be in violation of his suspension and could face expulsion. Mr. Connor says he recalled being suspended only for games, not practice.

The incident prompted Mr. Spanier to visit Dr. Triponey at her home. Dr. Triponey confirms he told her that Mr. Paterno had given him an ultimatum: Fire her, or Mr. Paterno would stop fund-raising for the school. She says Mr. Spanier told her that if forced to choose, he would choose her over the coach—but that he did not want to have to make that choice.

Later, Mr. Connor's suspension was reduced to 10 days, allowing him to return to football.

In 2007, as many as two dozen players broke into an off-campus apartment, sparking a melee that captured headlines and prompted the police to file criminal charges against six Penn State football players. "Pretty much the entire Penn State defense broke in and started swinging bar stools and stuff," says John Britt, then a third-year criminal-justice major who was beaten up in the incident. Mr. Britt says he took a beer bottle to the back of the head—and that players apparently continued to beat him after he'd lost consciousness. (Now 25, Mr. Britt serves warrants for state court in Philadelphia.)

Dr. Triponey's department began an inquiry. According to a Penn State employee's record of the proceedings, Mr. Spanier was involved in at least nine meetings with representatives of the judicial-affairs department, and Mr. Paterno was involved in at least six.

In a meeting with Messrs. Paterno and Spanier and others, Dr. Triponey complained that the players were stonewalling her and suggested that Mr. Paterno ought to compel them to be truthful, according to one person familiar with the meeting. Mr. Paterno angrily responded that his players couldn't be expected to cooperate with the school's disciplinary process because, in this case, they would have to testify against each other, making it hard to play football together, these people say.

In the end, police dropped many of the charges against the players, and two pleaded guilty to misdemeanors. The school's inquiry led to four players being suspended for a summer semester. They did not miss any games.

Coach Paterno imposed his own punishment: he said the whole team would spend two hours cleaning up the stadium after home games that fall.

After Dr. Triponey's departure, the university hired Bob Secor, a former vice provost at the school, to head a committee to examine the judicial-review process. Mr. Secor says that Mr. Paterno told him that he didn't think other people should be able to decide whether a football player should be able to play or not. "And we agreed with that," he says.

On Oct. 1, 2007, Mr. Spanier accepted the committee's recommended changes. Under the new rules, the judicial-review process would have only a limited ability to end a student's participation in activities—including football.

"The committee's rationale, which I fully support, is based on the assumption that involvement in student activities is for the most part a healthy influence on student behavior," Mr. Spanier wrote. "Removing such involvement as a way of getting a student's attention to correct misbehavior may or may not be productive."

—*Rachel Bachman, Kevin Helliker and John W. Miller contributed to this article.*

Write to Reed Albergotti at reed.albergotti@wsj.com

Copyright © 2017 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <http://www.djreprints.com>.

