



# Texas Association of Sports Officials

**Michael Fitch**  
Executive Director

---

## **Testimony before the UIL State Executive Committee October 15, 2015**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the UIL State Executive Committee, UIL Staff. I'm here representing the 14,500 members of the Texas Association of Sports Officials.

When I last appeared before this committee I advised you that our final report regarding the alleged racial slurs directed towards members of the John Jay High School Football team by a TASO sports official would be completed within 10 days. As we compiled the report we determined there were other individuals that should be interviewed, so we proceeded to contact and interview them. To date we have conducted over 20 in-person interviews and collected numerous additional documentation and statements. Additionally, this week we filed a request with the UIL to obtain the testimony from the last SEC meeting that we will be transcribing and including in the report.

Our investigation is now truly nearing completion. While we apologize for not having the final work product to you today, we do feel like we have been extremely thorough in our collection and compilation of pertinent data and statements surrounding this incident. Upon completion, we can either provide you each a copy of the report by mail or give them to UIL staff for distribution – we'll coordinate with staff.

As I mentioned earlier, we now have numerous interviews, emails, sworn statements, and data points that have been reviewed and re-reviewed. I will not attempt to get deep into the weeds with you today regarding the pages and pages of documentation that we have compiled, you will have ample opportunity to sift through that documentation very soon.

What I would like to do is boil this issue down to the two key issues that are vital for TASO to address in this investigation:

- 1) Determine if racial slurs were made? And;
- 2) Did the crew officiating the game handle some aspects of the final 3 minutes of the game appropriately?

The simple answer to item #1 is that we have not been able to uncover any evidence, other than hearsay by student players, that would corroborate or give us reason to believe that Mr. Watts did or even would have been inclined to use racial slurs. That determination is made from a careful analysis and cross reference of the various statements by players and coaches as well as circumstantial evidence from character witnesses of various ethnic backgrounds who have personal knowledge of Mr. Watts.

The simple answer to #2 is that we do believe the crew technically handled the final minutes of the game appropriately as prescribed by NCAA rules and UIL exceptions. We think a close review of the rules related to game stoppage reveals that the crew proceeded through their protocols correctly.

Clearly, communication between Coaches and Officials is of the utmost importance in these types of circumstances. All indications from the interviews and statements was that a good working relationship and communication did exist between Coaches and Officials up to the final minutes of the game.

That said, TASO will use this game in future training opportunities with our members to fully stress the importance of timely and appropriate communication between our Officials and Coaching staff should instances like this arise again in a game setting. TASO will also recommend that UIL examine their NCAA exceptions and determine if they believe any additional exceptions are warranted in regard to game stoppage.

I now want to address these two items more specifically...

In regard to the allegations against Mr. Watts. We will include in our report a copy of the sworn statement you have previously received from Mr. Watts. He unequivocally denies making any such racial comments.

We interviewed the officials that were crewmembers during the Jay Football game as well as members of Mr. Watts' crew from last year, one of whom is African American.

We have interviewed the members of the Marble Falls chain crew that were working the Jay sideline during that game.

We have interviewed 10 Jay high school coaches that were in the team area during the Marble Falls game.

We interviewed Jay Player #11 and #7. Player #11 states he heard a racial slur once and that the slur was directed at him personally. Player #7 states he heard the racial slur twice and was immediately near Player #11 when the slur occurred. Coach Gutierrez's knowledge of the events seem to have stemmed from a conversation he had with Coach Garcia who had spoken directly to Players #11 and #7.

It is very important to note that there exists an inconsistency between the account of the actual phrasing of the slur as recounted in Player #11's statement and Player #7's statement.

Player #11's statement of the phrasing of the slur is substantively different than that of Player #7. Additionally of interest is that only Player #11 mentions that the "F..." word was used by Mr. Watts – this omission by Player #7 is worth noting and seems out of place due to the scrutiny that has been given to the exact words used on the field.

One additional glaring inconsistency exists regarding the number of players that allegedly heard a racial slur. According to the Northside ISD investigation summary provided to TASO in the week immediately following the incident, Players #7 and #11 were the only Jay players who claim to have heard the racial slur. However, during their appearance on the Good Morning America television show, Jay Players #81 and #12, now claim they also heard a racial slur. This allegation was not stated in the Northside ISD investigation summary.

Finally, at the previous SEC meeting we heard from Coach Green from Marble Falls. Coach Green testified that he asked his team multiple times to come and talk to him if any of the Marble Falls players heard anything similar to a racial slur. Game footage suggests that a number of Marble Falls players were likely just a few feet from Mr.

Watts at the time when racial slurs would have been made. To date no Marble Falls players have come forward confirming the alleged slur.

Based on the statements and analysis presented above that will be fully presented in our final report to you, TASO finds no corroborating evidence that Mr. Watts used a racial slur. Absent additional facts, or unless there are other areas this committee would like for us to investigate, TASO will be closing our investigation shortly and will not be recommending a further action by the TASO Football Division Board of Directors.

In regard to the handling of this matter on the field by the crew in the course of play.

At the last meeting this committee had questions concerning the procedure used by the crew once the Jay coach notified the Heads Linesman that his players were claiming a member of the officiating crew had used a racial slur.

According to the John Jay investigation, this situation occurred sometime during plays 142 to 146. The Head Linesman told the coach that he would discuss this with the Referee and report back during the next dead ball situation. This is the normal procedure when a coach has a complaint or question concerning a call or other actions involving another member of the officiating crew.

Unfortunately, the Head Linesman did not have an opportunity to do this as on play number 148 Jay Players #12 and #81 hit the Umpire from behind. However, immediately following that play, both the Umpire and Referee spoke to the Jay head coach. That exchange is reflected in detail in both Mr. Watts' statement and in Coach Gutierrez's interview, both of which you will have soon for review. The exchange at

that time was pointed, but was also rather routine as both men have described it in their statements.

Following your line of questioning at the previous SEC meeting regarding whether the game should have been stopped to discuss the racial slur allegation when it was first reported to the Head Linesman, TASO took a close look at the pertinent NCAA Rule in question.

NCAA Rule 3-3-4-e states:

*e. A player, incoming substitute or head coach may request a head coach's conference with the referee, if the coach believes a rule has been enforced improperly. If the rule enforcement is not changed, the coach's team will be charged a timeout, or a delay penalty if all timeouts have been used.*

- 1. Only the referee may stop the clock for a head coach's conference.*
- 2. A request for a head coach's conference or challenge must be made before the ball is snapped or free-kicked for the next play and before the end of the second or fourth period (Rules 5-2-9).*
- 3. After a head coach's conference or challenge, the full team timeout is granted if charged by the referee.*

Note that the rule states that a coach's conference may be requested if the coach believes a rule has been enforced improperly only, there is no provision in the rules for stopping the clock in a situation such as this. The coach may call a timeout at any time during a dead ball if one is available.

As we use NCAA Football rules with the UIL exceptions, any variance to rule 3-3-4-e would need to be approved by the UIL Football rules committee. We recommend the UIL staff add this to the agenda of their next meeting.

The TASO Football Board of Directors annually reviews all TASO Football mechanics and procedures and situations such as this will absolutely be reviewed going forward.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this process. Unless you have any questions or additional tasks for us, we will complete our work for you and get you the complete report for your review.

We obviously take this incident very seriously for both our TASO members as well as for the schools and students athletes we serve. We look forward to moving forward with UIL in a positive way and continue to try to learn and enhance our performance as game officials for a sport we all love to watch and participate in.

#####