



# Texas Association of Sports Officials

**Michael Fitch**  
Executive Director

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## **TESTIMONY TO THE UIL STATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**September 24, 2015**

**Michael Fitch, Executive Director**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the UIL State Executive Committee (SEC), UIL Staff. On behalf of the 14,500 members of the Texas Association of Sports Officials, thank you for allowing me to speak before this committee.

It saddens and concerns me that we are gathered here today to address the incident before this committee, but together we must discover the facts and make difficult decisions. Today, I would like to report our initial findings.

First, in many of my previous presentations to the UIL Legislative Council, I have included the TASO Mission/Values/Vision statement, I would like to highlight a few of the points contained in that document which is the guiding document of TASO when making decision, including how we handle the current incident.

First, our MISSION. While we may not be the only organization of officials in Texas we are by far the largest and we have a full time staff dedicated to advocating for improved working conditions for sports officials and supporting our members in many areas, including situations such as this.

Our VALUES.

Integrity, we strive to create and abide by the highest levels of integrity.

Transparency, we strive to operate with a high level of transparency concerning our policies and procedures when interacting with our members, the UIL and TAPPS, and the schools we serve.

Accountability, we strive to be accountable not only to our members, but also to the student athletes and schools we serve.

Now I would like to address the allegations made against TASO member, Robert Watts. Even though an official complaint has never been filed with TASO, Coach Laing from Northside ISD provided me with a summary of the NISD internal investigation. The summary included allegations by student athletes of racial slurs being directed to John Jay players by Mr. Watts.

Staying true to our values, there was no doubt or hesitation that these allegations must be investigated.

To ensure the UIL, the State Executive Committee, Northside ISD and the public in general that a totally unbiased and transparent investigation would be conducted, the TASO Football Division Board of Directors approved a budget and directed me to engage a private firm with no ties to any of the parties involved to conduct the investigation. After considering several different companies, I selected Peden Investigations. Peden Investigations uses retired FBI agents who are skilled and experienced in conducting interviews and I felt this skill and experience would be a good match for this assignment.

Peden Investigations was directed to conduct a thorough and complete investigation and to follow the facts wherever they may lead. They have completed their tasks and are in the final stages of completing their written report. I have asked Mr. Bob Peden to join us today and provide you with a summary of his findings. When his final report is complete we will provide that to the SEC as well.

[PEDEN VERBAL REPORT HERE]

The missing piece of our report was the interview with Marble Falls. I want to thank Dr. Allen and Coach Green for their testimony here today that provided some very important facts.

In addition to securing the services of independent firm to conduct the investigation, TASO has reviewed the game video play-by-play.

After each varsity football game, the crew completes a foul report detailing all fouls called, accepted and declined. There have been insinuations that the fouls called were one-sided favoring Marble Falls. A review of the foul report indicates that there were 17 fouls against Jay and 15 against Marble Falls. I have invited Mike Wise, TASO

Football Director of Training, here today. Mr. Wise will give you a brief overview of his findings following his detailed review of all fouls called.

[WISE VIDEO GAME REVIEW HERE]

Again, our investigation is almost complete. I anticipate that I will give you written notice of our findings and a copy of the final Peden report within the next 10 days.

TASO has demonstrated our commitment to fully investigate the allegations in a transparent and unbiased manner. ***The investigation has uncovered absolutely no collaborating evidence that a racial slur was made. No coach, no official, no adult involved in the game, no opposing team member has provided any evidence of personal knowledge of racial slurs.***

Mr. Chairman, your committee has the task to determine the fate of the players, the coaches, and John Jay High School, a task that I do not envy. As you consider your options, I, on behalf of the 14,500 member of TASO .... no, on behalf of the hundred of thousands of high school officials through the Unites States encourage you to take into consideration the pre-mediated nature of this attack, the viciousness of this attack, the indefensible motives of this attack, the resulting consequences of this attack, and take appropriate action.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this process. Unless you have any questions or additional tasks for us, we will plan to conclude our investigation in the very near future and hopefully get back to focusing on officiating the game we love and serving the student athletics of Texas.

Thank you.