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Families join hazing lawsuit against suburban district

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Three families joined a lawsuit this week accusing a suburban school district of allowing hazing on sports teams that involved physical and sexual assaults.

The lawsuit, originally filed by the parents of a freshman at Maine West High School, names Maine Township High School District 207, staff and faculty as defendants.

Filed Nov. 19 in Cook County Circuit Court, the original suit by a boy's parents alleges that members of the varsity boys' soccer team physically and sexually assaulted the boy in September.

The suit says that during a soccer practice, Emlio Rodriguez, Michael Divincenzo and other unidentified coaches ordered a "campus run." After that order, team members grabbed the 14-year-old boy and assaulted him, the suit says.

The coaches did not intervene, the suit says.

The team members pushed the boy to the ground; shoved dirt in his face; struck his head, torso, back, arms and legs; and removed his pants and underwear, the suit says.

Next, the suit alleges, team members held down the boy while others grabbed his testicles and sodomized him with fingers and other objects.

The suit says the assault was "part of the soccer team's culture

and has been sanctioned by its coaches for years."

Two other plaintiffs — one who is a current varsity soccer player and the other who is a former student who played on the team — also alleged that they endured a similar hazing of battery and assault.

One alleged that team members hazed him in September; the other alleged that his assault happened in 2007.

The fourth plaintiff, whose parents joined the suit Wednesday, played on the baseball team. The suit alleges that coaches directed team members to sexually assault and beat him in 2008.

Antonio M. Romanucci and Rebekah L. Williams of Romanucci & Blandin LLC represent the families.

Romanucci said the school's handbook addresses bullying but the school and district administration failed to enforce the policies.

"The policies are pretty strict, but it's the enforcement of the policies," he said. "If you have laws but then lawlessness, and no one there to stop it, it does no good."

Public Justice, a firm based in Washington, D.C., and Theodore J. Leopold of Leopold Law P.A. in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., also represent the families.

Michael E. Kujawa of Judge, James & Kujawa LLC will represent the school district and its faculty and staff, which



Antonio M. Romanucci

include Rodriguez, Divincenzo and the school's principal, Audrey Haugan.

"I don't know enough at this point as to make any comment as to the merits of the case," Kujawa said.

"Only having seen the (original) complaint and not having much chance to evaluate it, all I can say is these are allegations in a complaint. Whether the allegations and the facts match up, we'll have to wait and see."

Kujawa said when the firm represented another school about four years ago in a hazing suit, the case was dismissed.

Scott A. Andresen, founder of Andresen & Associates P.C. and chairman of The Chicago Bar Association Sports Law Committee, said even though hazing is a tradition in society,



Michael E. Kujawa

"it doesn't mean it should be condoned."

"It's a disgusting practice and I don't think it builds unity," he said. "I think it just creates a culture of victimization."

Based on the allegations, Andresen said "this was a fairly prevalent culture that was consistently propagated from one class to the next."

"I think it will be interesting to see who knew what and when," said Andresen, who isn't affiliated with the suit.

"When did the coaches know about it? Did they condone it? Did they turn a blind eye? Were they recklessly indifferent to what was happening?"

The case is *John and Jane Doe A, etc., et al. v. Maine Township High School District 207, et al.* No. 12 L 13081.