
NEWS RELEASE

AIA APOLOGIZES TO NAVAJO NATION AND TAKES CONTINUED ACTION ON CULTURAL SENSITIVITY TRAINING EFFORTS

PHOENIX, AZ (February 4, 2016) – On February 2nd, before the girl’s basketball game between Flagstaff High School and Greenway High School, the AIA official noticed the Flagstaff High School team members were each wearing a special bun and yarn in their hair. The official, citing the high school rulebook, made a judgment call that the “hair control devices” (Rule 3.5.4.d) could be a safety issue (Rule 3.7). As a medical professional, the official had an eye on safety and asked the girls to remove the dangling elements of the hair control device.

According to Flagstaff High School, the buns and yarn were worn in honor of the Navajo Nation as part of an appreciation celebration. According to Gary Whelchel, AIA State Commissioner of Officials, the official acted within his authority and by rulebook. “It is unfortunate that we didn’t know prior to the game the plans for this celebration. The official did not mean any insult to the girls or Navajo Nation and on behalf of the AIA, we apologize for any upset the situation may have caused.”

Dr. Harold Slemmer, AIA Executive Director, added, “This situation highlights two important areas. We need to continue developing greater cultural sensitivity through training and open dialogue while improving bi-directional communications between the AIA and member schools. While we have ongoing efforts in both of these areas, we will be bolstering our internal training and continue to reinforce open communication between our team and member schools.”

About the Arizona Interscholastic Association:

The AIA is a voluntary association of public and private Arizona high schools. Since 1913, the organization has created and sustained interscholastic activities that encourage maximum student participation by providing AIA member schools with an even playing field to ensure fair and equitable competition. The AIA believes that providing interscholastic activities for Arizona high school students creates personal development opportunities with a balanced focus on academics and extracurricular activities.

Through its Arizona member schools, the AIA reaches more than 100,000 participants in high school activity programs. The organization hosts 5,000 championship contests and maintains officiating for more than 45,000 regular season games. For more information, visit www.aiaonline.org and <http://www.azpreps365.com>

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