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Schools chief overturns suspensions

Michael Gannon, Register Staff

NORTH BRANFORD — Two high school football players cited for possession of alcohol when police raided an alleged underage drinking party last weekend were cleared to play in Friday's homecoming game after their suspensions were overturned by Superintendent Robert K. Wolfe.

The action incensed Deputy Police Chief Michael Doody.

The students cleared included Matthew Rossi, 18, the starting quarterback for North Branford High School's football team.

Wolfe said three students who were charged Oct. 21 appealed their school-level suspensions to him. One was denied. "We conducted a very thorough investigation in which we put a lot of time and energy," Wolfe said. "It included the students' written appeals, interviews with the kids and interviews with other kids who were there."

Six students had been suspended from the game and homecoming activities after police raided the party at the home of Caroline Pethick, 172 Notch Hill Road. Four other athletes at the party were given warnings and will be required to perform community service.

In all, 19 minors were involved, Wolfe said, 10 of them athletes. Ten of the youths were charged with possession of alcohol by a minor. Pethick was charged with failure to halt possession of alcohol by a minor.

Doody said his officers were disappointed in the ruling. "Did Dr. Wolfe just ask the kids if they didn't do it?" Doody asked. "Did he talk to the police officers involved or ask them to testify at any hearing? If two of my officers see someone shoot somebody and see them over the body with a smoking gun, does a judge allow the killer to walk if he says he didn't do it?"

Doody surmised that Wolfe did not want to deal with any outside pressures that might have been brought to bear from enforcing the suspensions. "I think that's the sign of a weak superintendent," he said.

Wolfe said he had an initial conversation with police Monday. "I made another call that was not returned," he said.

Doody said he had his doubts.

"Officials in this town are in constant touch with each other," he said. "People have my cell phone number."

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