

Ian Kepran

Interview Questions

10/31/2023

## Kepran's Investigation Questions

Runner: Remi Kepran

This complaint is in regards to Frank and Regina Merritt's status as cross county coached at AHS. It is important to note aggressive behavior from the Merritts began a year ago when our eldest son (2023 AHS graduate) began dating a young Muslim woman.

**Merritts' written response 10/31/2023 - A year ago Eddie and Remi were actually at our house, along with Naomi Frakes and Maddy Nichols and several other kids enjoying our home, fire-pit, pool, borrowing our surfboards to learn how to surf, Frank pushing them into waves to help them learn to surf, and me preparing more meals and desserts than I can remember. Eddie and Remi said I cooked more meals for them than both their parents combined.**

**So I guess we're not guilty of "aggressive behavior", but just maybe hospitality. Nor was it who Eddie was dating. In regard to whom he was dating, Eddie actually asked if he could pick some roses and hibiscus from our home garden to take on his first few dates with this young lady. Never knew her religious background until this complaint was filed. We met her for about 30 seconds in the AHS parking lot after a football game. That is the extent of knowledge that we have of her but we did note that at least initially this relationship made Eddie very happy. Eddie not liking us because he started dating a young lady one year ago from when the Keprans submitted their formal complaint is not true. Kind of consistent with all the "facts" this family has lied about and misconstrued.**

**This picture actually**



just popped up today on our Facebook feed from one year ago 10/23/22 memory on Facebook. 3 of the 4 kids that alleged that we are bad people are in this picture having a blast at our house, eating our food, etc.

Remi squatting in the middle, Naomi in the blue next to him and Maddie with two thumbs up eating a hotdog. The Keprans

older son Eddie is to the left of Remi as you are looking at the photo. On a separate occasion, a couple of weeks after this picture last year when Remi was laughing about how much he eats when he is at our house, Remi said "there is never any food at our home but my dad will have a steak and 2 beers for himself". Even though Frank thought this was just a teenager exaggerating the home situation, Remi's comments put Frank into a weird situation because no longer was Frank just his friends dad, he was serving as an assistant cross country coach and there are BDS policies about reporting. Subsequently Frank discussed Remi's comments with AD Green who advised him that the policy was to tell the head coach, Tom Dever. Frank discussed this with Coach Dever who said he would handle it since he was good friends with Ian Kepran and the two boys. It was after this that we noticed a sudden change in Ian, Eddie and Remi's attitude toward us and our boys. We never accused them of anything but only followed BDS policy as per AD Green's instructions. We thought teachers and coaches when they report a suspicion were supposed to be protected from retaliation; this doesn't seem to be the case here. We were just doing what we were told to do.

8/9/2023: requested a meeting with Head Coach Regina Merritt. 8/10/2023: call between myself and Mr. and Mrs. Merritt to discuss the difficulty our athlete, Remi, was having adjusting to the change. We were looking for them to help us support him through the change in coaching style, team culture/overt religious presence and training plan (Remi was running ~40miles/week during the summer to running less than 10miles a week with their training plan). **First resolution put forward by them was to remove my athlete from AHS XC so he could run at another school.** After the call, the coaches scheduled a meeting with AD Green before allowing us the time requested to communicate as parents.

**Merritt's written response 10/25/2023** - *Talk to me about the phone call and the difficulty you saw Remi having at this time. Did you recommend him to run for another school? If so, why would you want him to run for another school?*

Not sure about the "difficulty"? Regarding the training, the statement about the training

program is inaccurate. Katrina relayed to us Remi was not happy. She mentioned she worked close to North Bay Haven and lived close to Bay High and that would be convenient for her if she could convince Ian to have Remi live with her instead of with Ian. We didn't recommend him go anywhere.

**Kepran Interview**

- 1) Did you relay that Remi was not happy as the Merritts state above and that you worked close to NBH and lived close to BHS, so that would be convenient? Please explain this conversation/

8/18/2023: Meeting with AD Green, Frank and Regina Merritt: Frank Merritt lied repeatedly about things that were said during our call. Our request for freedom from religion was not addressed until the end of the meeting, when AD Green asked Regina if she would create a second chat group just for team information only. It was agreed it would be in place by 8/21/2023.

8/27/2023: Invitation finally received for second "team info only" group (via "band"). Team information NOT equally disseminated between original Group Me and Band. If we had not searched through the Group Me, we would not have been aware of changes in practice locations, race location and start times for the Buccaneer Bash and our athlete may have lost the opportunity to compete at the FSU Invitational.

**Merritt written response 10/25/2023** *please discuss why the team information was not equally discussed on the two platforms?*

The Kepran are the only ones that asked for a new app but I did go through the work and trouble of creating this for them. Despite having a new app, the Keprans have never gotten off GroupMe and still respond there to non practice related comments such as pep rally information, so they get information. Also, Remi is on GroupMe, not on Band, so he gets all the information as well. There are times that they respond on GroupMe when I do post on Band so them getting information is not an issue.

Katrina actually did reach out to me at some point in time to remind me to put information on Band and I told her thank you I was still getting used to putting information on 2 different sites. Ian and Katrina are the only 2 active parents on Band. I do this for them, per their request. Once again, they are also active on GroupMe. I go through the trouble to accommodate them. They are the only ones that requested a new app.

**Kepran Interview - The Merritts state that you wanted a new app and they went through all the trouble to create one, yet you only respond on the "GroupMe" app and are active on that one only.**

8/27/2023: Merritts announce that practices are closed. Since there wasn't a team contract or rules, this now seems like they're trying to hide something.

*Merritt written response 10/25/2023 - Was this date the first time that you implemented closed practice? If so, why? How was this communicated to the families?*

Once again, we mentioned this at the initial player/parent meeting and mentioned it was consistent with football, basketball and many other sports. No parents attended any practices. When the incident with Jordan Nichols happened, we sent out on our social media apps a reminder that practices were closed (as Jordan coming in to practice in full military gear was very intimidating not only to the coaches but we had parents call whose children noticed a very angry man at practice). We do this to *protect* our student athletes and for them to be able to fully concentrate on our practices without distractions. Once again, many other sports have closed practices and we got this guidance from AD Green.

**Merritt's Interview 10/30/2023**

- 1) **Just for clarification since I had several families mention you kept adding or changing the rules throughout the season, you are claiming you discussed all of this verbally at the initial parent meeting?**

Frank: discussed parents being at practice from the very first team meeting. Not really any such thing as "closed." They can be just outside the gate and watch. Just can't have traffic coming in and out of the area as practice is pretty hectic w/20 runners. Best practices on team building. Lots of individualization within their training, but they do always ask that everyone warms up with their team and cools down with their team. "Leave no man behind." Your fastest runners can't go off to the tent and not stay around to encourage their teammates. Sometimes that means their fastest runners staying at the finish line for a significant amount of time. But all these are rules that had been in place all along.

9/16/2023: Buccaneer Bash: Our athlete crossed finish line first, ahead of Merritts' son. Prescribed cool down was only 1/2 mile, Remi finished his needed longer cool down with athletes from other teams Frank Merritt announced Monday AM before school practice would be held at Frank Brown. The coaches were private messaged about the inconvenience of this on a school morning for a working parent. No direct response was received from them. Instead, the practice moved farther away, meeting at Boondocks off Hwy 79.

Merritt written response 10/25/2023- Why was practice moved further away? Was this discussed on the team chat or the other chat?

We, the coaches, made a coaching decision based on an upcoming meet that had hills and we needed to run at West Bay Bridge to prepare and we had run at West Bay Bridge on multiple occasions before and have since, it is a common training practice for us and all programs. This is what the team needed to be successful, that is all. The change was posted on both team apps.

9/21/2023: Coach introduced three new rules presented by team captains: **1-no warmup with athletes from other schools; 2-no cool down with athletes from other schools and 3-all athletes must remain at the finish to cheer their team on.** Failure to meet these rules will result in the athlete being suspended from the meet of the coach's choice. When I questioned these rules, clearly targeting our athlete's cool down run the previous Saturday, I was then informed a race official had made a complaint about our son for using a foul word at the finish line ("Move your ass"), 5 days later. We have asked AD Green for the name of the official, but we have yet to receive that information.

*Merritt's written response 10/25/2023 Why were three new rules being implemented this late in the season. Did you have them written down or just verbal?*

**They weren't new rules. They were verbal. It was Remi's teammates that wanted these reiterated because his teammates expressed their hurt when he ran with another team after the meet. Remi's actions that day, whether intentional or not, caused discourse and we decided to do team building activities the next week including football and basketball to bring the team back together.**

9/27/2023: Ian and Remi received a text from Merritts saying Coach Laatsch informed them Remi would like to train independently outside the team. Remi will be able to run his on his own Monday-Wednesday, and must join the team for Thursday practices at school

10/12/2023

Email from Mr. Kepran

Also, it has been brought to my attention that the Merritt's have told the team not to post on Strava. Strava is a social media application that allows athletes, specifically runners, interact and post their accomplishments and milestones in their training. For context most college level runners and coaches are on this application. I don't know why the kids aren't allowed to post on the app. And I don't know what the punishment would be if they do post in the app. Rémi is active in the app and it gives him a way to track his brother and for his brother to watch his progress. The only reason we've heard the app was banned was that Frank didn't want other coaches tracking his teams workouts. These workouts are posted after the fact and the students could just as easily tell anyone about the workout. We've signed no form of a Non-disclosure agreement with Frank or his company. And what right does he have to tell anyone's child what social media the child can or cannot use. Is he going to ban them from Instagram, or Facebook. That is a parent or guardians choice

**Merritt's written response 10/25/2023** Please respond to the below email I received from Mr. Kepran on 10/12/2023. What is your reasoning for not allowing the runners to post about their workout.

Discussed this with Coach Green as well and he says we totally have the right to not share our training. Coaches do not just give over their "playbooks", that is all. Our training is not like everyone else's training and other coaches in the area have mentioned following on Strava to find out how we are

training. We only asked the runners not to post on our team workout days, which is only 2 days a week. Is anyone reading this a football fan? When is the last time Nick Saban or Bill Belichick gave their playbook to the opposing team? Common sense here. We just won the county XC meet, everyone wants to know what we are doing differently so they can do it. Additionally, smart watches, which cost hundreds of dollars, are required to be on Strava and other apps and not all of our runners come from homes that can afford such equipment. There is a lot of peer pressure for kids to have fancy clothes, cars, and in cross country to have a fancy smart watch. Frank and I have consistently told the runners that an inexpensive chrono watch from Walmart or Target is sufficient thus trying to eliminate the peer pressure that some of these kids feel. Continued talk of smart watches and Strava only escalates this peer pressure from lower income families. Our goal is to have a totally inclusive program for all.

Kepran's response 10/31/2023 - Any response you would like to add: