

### Frank and Regina Merritt Timeline

**Beginning of the Summer** – Madelynn informed us that she had been approved by the Merritts to continue to train with Coach Tom Dever (the prior XC coach) during the summer rather than attend Merritt practices. Frank called Madelynn to let her know it is fine if she trained with Tom but suggested that she is consistent in who she trains with as to not cause an injury.

Madelynn told her parents that she felt a division in the team. She said Frank mentioned that they could see whose training was better after 2 athletes trained with Tom and 2 athletes trained with him. She didn't like the comment and felt like he was creating unhealthy competition among teammates.

- Frank claims Madelynn was dividing the team by not doing their team workouts. He told several athletes this. Irina Franks confirmed that Frank told her this.
- Madelynn was doing what Frank told her to do by not switching back and forth.
- Now Frank is holding the summer training against her.

**June 7** – Jordan sends the following private messages to Frank and Regina Merritt (see screenshots attachment 10):

To Frank Merritt: "Coach Merritt, thank you so much for coaching. I continue to pray for positive male role models for Maddie. Please let Lauren and I know how we can support you and your efforts."

To Regina Merritt: "Coach Regina, I just want to say thank you for coaching! Please let Lauren and I know how we can support you."

- At the beginning of the summer, the Merritt's started telling athletes and parents that there were four families targeting them. These messages do not seem to indicate such claims, but rather quite the opposite. We had no idea we were one of the four families.

**First week of July** – Regina asks for donations to be made no later than July 8 to take advantage of a local donor's pledge to match donations. Madelynn contacted Samuel Merritt to see when she could drop off a check. She was given a time and then later received a message to leave it in the mailbox. When she dropped off the check, Frank was mowing the lawn but did not acknowledge her. She said it was awkward and she thought he saw her. She again mentioned that something wasn't right.

**July 11** – Madelynn heard about 2 new runners to the team who are automatically made team captains.

**July 12** -First team practice with one of the new captains – Madelynn went to practice to meet one of the team captains for the first time. At the end of the run, Madelynn noticed that Kennedy Flores had not finished the race. Kennedy was sitting in the car with her mom, Stacy Flores, and Madelynn went to check on her. Kennedy was rude and Stacy lashed out at Madelynn and said everyone left her daughter behind. Madelynn had no idea she had been expected to run as slow as Kennedy, as Kennedy is a better xc runner and no one else seemed to think they were to slow their pace to Kennedy's pace either. Madelynn had been training hard all summer and was there to do her best with the team. She came home and mentioned the awkward interaction between her and Kennedy and Stacy. Again, she mentioned that something wasn't right.

**Saturday, Aug 12** – We had a family weekend at a lake house and Madelynn invited Naomi Frakes and Zayna September to join us. Zayna's mother, Ambereen Latif, dropped Zayna off and stopped in to meet

us for the first time. Ambereen began to fill us in on the details of what has happened to Zayna on the XC team. Please refer to Zayna's parents for their account of Zayna's story. Ambereen told us that as early as June, Frank told her that a few families were against him. He didn't name them at that time but went on about how much he had helped them succeed and how his wife had fed them and now they were against him. Ambereen continued, the day Frank called Ambereen to tell her that Zayna had quit (Friday, Aug. 11), Frank named Remi Kepran and said he had spoken to Mr. Green and he was going to have Remi released to run for another school. Ambereen questioned that and he tried to back pedal but said that Remi didn't want to run for Arnold. Then he named Maddie and said she was going to be injured all season because she only runs flats and doesn't like hills and will be of no use to the team. He mentioned an out of shape kid that had no interest in running either and that they all were trying to break up the team and bring them down. Ambereen was still trying to get her brain around what he was saying about Zayna and Remi and the four kids that she didn't ask the names of the other two. Later, she realized her family was the fourth family.

- At this point, no one had ever mentioned to us that Madelynn was too injured to run this season, or that running on flat ground could cause injuries.
- Frank should not have been discussing our daughter's medical condition with another parent.

**Sunday, Aug 13** – Regina Merritt called and conferenced Stacy Flores into the call. Regina started the conversation by saying Madelynn has a chance to run at the college level in the 800m. She then tried to get us to say that the 800m is Madelynn's top priority. We corrected her and told her that we are not sure if that is her top priority. She really hasn't had much experience in the 800m and is still trying to find out what race she is best at. In the meantime, she just wants to run and be part of a team.

Then Regina told us that she is a physical therapist and concerned about Madelynn's injury. She said Madelynn shouldn't run for 6-8 weeks. We had already had Madelynn seen by a physical therapist and athletic trainer and they both told us that Madelynn can train/compete to her tolerance. Regina continued to try and push her opinion that Madelynn is out for at least 6-8 weeks of no running. Regina also suggested that instead of coming to practice in the morning, she should go see her physical therapist and trainer. Jordan suspected that she was trying to tell us that Madelynn should quit the team to recover and focus on the track season for the 800m. Additionally, he was concerned that they were trying to get her to voluntarily not come to morning practices and instead go to rehab, this would prevent her from making it to the 10 practices necessary to compete. Jordan immediately interjected and said she needs to be part of the team no matter how long it takes her to rehab her injury and he didn't want her missing practices for physical therapy. The team is very important to Madelynn, not only physically, but emotionally and socially.

- Regina was using her and Frank's medical expertise to convince us to have Madelynn sit out the XC season. If they were using their medical expertise, then they should also know that under HIPAA, they are not allowed to share medical information with anyone other than the patient and their guardians. This was a violation of Madelynn's privacy.

Somewhere in the conversation, Stacy Flores began to speak and told us that something is different about Madelynn and that she just doesn't seem happy. We directly asked Stacy and Regina if they had any specific examples. We also directly ask if Madelynn has been unkind to other runners or the

coaches. Regina mentioned that one time when Frank was talking to the team, Madelynn corrected him with a rude tone. Regina also mentioned that Madelynn was rude to one of the team captains during the first practice when she ran with him. I explained that I thought Madelynn had felt left out of the team captain decision and her feelings had been hurt. Regina said Madelynn was not made team captain because Kennedy Flores was the only girl to come to all the summer practices. I explained that Madelynn had felt like she had been doing the team workouts all summer because she had received the approval of the coaches to do so. Madelynn is an upper classman, has history with the team and is one of the top runners for the team. She may have had feelings of being left out and overlooked. We also continued to share that Madelynn is well known for her positive attitude. Last year she made the varsity basketball team, not due to her skills, but because her positive and uplifting attitude was great for the team. We have only ever received rave reviews from teachers and coaches about what a great attitude Madelynn has. Regina and Stacy both agreed this was true and commented on how “bubbly” she usually is. I also told them that Madelynn had already commented on how much she likes the new captains, so I thought that was no longer an issue.

- They did not mention how rude Kennedy and Stacy had been to Madelynn at that very same practice.

These were the only two examples that the ladies gave, and we assured them that we would address them both with Madelynn.

Regina ended the conversation by saying that Madelynn had been telling people that her injury had been caused by the Merritts’ speed workout. We immediately shared with her that we did not believe that to be true and that the speed workout must have been the final thing she did before she realized her injury was too much to continue running. Regina asked us to ask Maddie to stop telling other people this. We told Regina we would talk with her.

We felt like we had come to a resolution on all points and Stacy said she would bring a bike for Madelynn to ride during practice.

That night, we talked to Madelynn about everything said during the conversation with Regina and Stacy. She agreed that she had possibly come across as rude to the captain but also said that she had already apologized to him. She was surprised that Regina said she had been rude to Frank. She said she had not meant to be but was simply asking a clarifying question. We told her that she should go talk to them and offer an apology. When we asked her about telling people the Merritt’s workout caused her injury, she said that she had only said that it was what finally made her injury worse. Madelynn said she wasn’t going around telling people it was their fault.

This same evening, Katrina Kepran, Remi Kepran’s mother, called Jordan to discuss XC team issues. Katrina shared Remi’s story with us. Please refer to Remi’s parents for their account of Remi’s story.

**Monday, August 14** – Jordan went to the morning practice to make sure that Madelynn was set up for an alternative rehab practice, and at that she would continue to get credit for the practice. He also had some concern about her getting credit for her practices since we had just had conversations with 2 other parents where it appeared that the Merritts were finding ways to usher kids off the xc team. Jordan felt good about the interaction and felt like we were on a path to resolving the concerns of Regina and Stacy.

**Approximately 8am** - Lauren received a phone call from Irina Frakes, Naomi Frakes' mother, asking if she knew what was going on with the XC team. Please refer to Naomi's mother for her story. Irina mentioned that on Friday, Aug. 11, when they called Irina, they told her that Madelynn was injured and not going to run for a period of time or even the whole season (this was before we had even discussed Madelynn's injury with them), inferring that Naomi would not have the support system of Madelynn on the team. Irina also mentioned that earlier in the summer, Regina had told her that Madelynn training with Tom over the summer was not good for the team.

- The coaches should not have brought Madelynn's name into their discussion with Irina Frakes. She had nothing to do with their conversation. The Merritts used Madelynn's injury to coerce Irina to have Naomi quit the team.

Shortly before noon, Jordan sent Madelynn a text message asking how practice was. She responded, "It was the worst." "...they said I was dragging the team down because I didn't seem happy".

When Madelynn returned home from school that evening, we asked her to tell us what happened. Madelynn went into more details.

That morning, Madelynn asked Frank and Regina if she could talk to them. She told them she didn't realize she had been rude and asked for clarification so she could not repeat the offense. They got angry with her and heaped more accusations of slandering their company, dividing the team, etc. on her. Madelynn asked for examples, but they wouldn't share with her any specific things she did or said. Then the conversation took another direction.

The conversation was roughly as follows:

Dr. Merritt – "Maddie, are you happy?"

Madelynn – "It doesn't matter if I'm happy, I'm here to run."

Dr. Merritt – It's not your decision. It doesn't work like that. If you are dragging the team down, then we can't have you as part of the team.

Frank then walked off without allowing her to finish and ultimately apologize. Madelynn was in disbelief and said, "but I wasn't done..." as she was trying to get to her apology. Frank claims that she rudely yelled at him "I WASN'T FINISHED TALKING TO YOU!".

When Madelynn shared this interaction with us, I had some serious concerns:

- Is happiness a requirement to be part of a team?
- Happiness is subjective, who gets to determine if someone is happy?
- Are unhappy kids not allowed on the team?
- What if unhappiness is temporary or due to a bad day? Can athletes have a bad day?
- Does a 16 y/o girl bear the responsibility of being happy as to not "drag down" a team?
- If the Merritts determine Madelynn is unhappy, will it make things better to disgrace and embarrass her? Kick her off the team? Make her more unhappy and potentially look at seriously harming herself or worse, suicide?

- Teen mental illness is a huge concern and team sports are a wonderful way for “unhappy” kids feel valued and included. Wouldn’t this be the exact opposite of what we would do to an “unhappy” kid?
- Madelynn is a military kid that is facing a lot of changes this year. She lost a beloved coach and is anticipating a move within the next year. Can she be allowed to grieve and work through her emotions? Being a part of a team, and more specifically the XC and track teams, is everything to her.

I would like to reiterate and highlight the fact that the words “happy” and “happiness” were repeatedly used over the words “bad attitude”.

**Tuesday, August 15** – After having serious concerns about how the Merritts had talked to our daughter, Jordan went to her morning practice. His intentions were to set up an air dyne bike for Madelynn to rehab on and have a talk with the Merritts. Frank and Regina greeted Jordan and were friendly until he asked to speak to them.

Jordan mentioned to them that we had received phone calls from other parents. He shared his concern that all of the coach/parent conversations started the same way with the Merritts attempting to find a way to terminate the athlete from the team, and by getting the parent to agree if possible. For Naomi it was a safety concern, for Zayna it was holding her to her words that she had quit, for Remi it was because he should run for another team, and for Maddie it was a concern for her injury.

The Merritts asked who the parents were, and Jordan told them. They then said they couldn’t talk about the situations but tried to get more details from Jordan. They told Jordan that they were “getting rid of the chaff”. Jordan asked them if students were “chaff”. Regina back pedaled and said, no they were not chaff. They told Jordan they had been targeted and had been bending over backwards for the team. They told Jordan that Madelynn had slandered their company by saying they caused her injury. They told Jordan that they had planned on kicking off Madelynn from the team the night prior via phone call due to her bad attitude. They then told Jordan that he could not attend practices. When Jordan asked why Regina was able to attend all the practices last year, they told him that Coach Dever’s policy allowed parents. And finally, they said that Jordan being at practice was intimidating.

- This is the first time they have referred to Madelynn as having a bad attitude rather than being unhappy. What changed? What was worthy of kicking her off the team the night before?

Three hours after Jordan was asked to leave practice, we received an email from Regina. Please see email chain (1-5).

**We feel this was in retaliation to Jordan trying to talk to them about our concerns.** The email implies that Madelynn has now had bad behavior in addition to a bad attitude. We have not been given one instance of her behaving badly. She has done exactly as she has been told. I will again reiterate that “bad behavior” has not been the words they have been using until this morning. They had been using “happy” and “happiness”, or simply referred to her as “different”. Additionally, we believe that this decision between the athletic director and the Merritts was an attempt to further isolate Madelynn from the team.

- Under the Code Conduct Policy, “Schools and teachers (coaches implied) may develop individual rules and disciplinary practices which supplement the School Board rules but do not conflict with those rules.”
- Under the Code Conduct Policy, “discipline should be applied after consideration of the eventual effect on the behavior of the student and should promote improved conduct.”
  - How can her discipline promote improved behavior if she doesn’t know what she did wrong?
- A suspension is a violation of the Code Conduct Policy, a suspension is a discipline measure outlined for major infraction.
- If Madelynn had been rude, as they claimed, this would fall under a minor infraction as “disrespect of school staff”.
  - Disciplinary measures for minor infractions include verbal correction, counseling, and parental contact.
  - The Merritt’s first step in addressing a minor infraction should have been immediate verbal correction. This would have also allowed Madelynn to understand what she had done wrong.
- This measure to isolate Madelynn from her team is a violation of the bullying policy.

Jordan responded to the email (see emails 3-4) and they offered to expedite the meeting. We declined to expedite the meeting until after we had had private meetings with Mr. Green and Mr. Smith. We immediately included Mr. Smith in the line of discussion because it appeared that Mr. Green had already made his decision to suspend Madelynn without hearing any facts about the situation from athlete or parents.

The Merritts followed up with an email (see email 5) implying that she was not committed to the team and that she had missed 4 of the 9 mandatory practices. Notes are on the email, but in short, Madelynn has never had an unexcused absence from practice. She was either excused for work or to do an alternate training. It appears that they would give Madelynn the appearance her practices were excused, but then hold it against her. Just like they gave her the approval of training with Tom Dever over the summer, even encouraging her to only run with him, and then holding it against her.

- By their account, Madelynn was only at 2 of the summer practices. They claim she missed 4 mandatory practices. This means she was only at 7 practices total. It should be relatively easy for them to give examples of her bad attitude and bad behavior from such few interactions.

**Wednesday, August 16** – We had a private meeting with Mr. Green. He listened intently, but nothing was done. He did agree that Madelynn did not have any unexcused practices.

**Thursday, August 17** – We had a private meeting with Mr. Smith. He listened intently and told us he hope to have everything wrapped up before the weekend, but nothing was done.

**Friday, August 18** – Jordan sent an email to inquire about Madelynn’s return to practice. Mr. Green responded that they cannot meet with us until the following Thursday (rather than the Tuesday meeting we had already agreed to) and she cannot return until after the meeting. We believe they continue delaying her return to practice to punish her for our private meetings with the AD and principal. The Merritts claim they cleared their schedules to meet with us early, but clearly told them that first we

wanted a private meeting with the AD and principal. We never requested that they change their schedules.

- They are continuing to exclude her without any examples of what she did wrong. This is more violations of the bullying policy and code of conduct and discipline policy.
- They are not only using isolation as a form of punishment, but also increase the punishment when the parents do not conform to their demands. This is retaliation, another violation of the bullying policy.

**Thursday, August 24** – Meeting with Mr. Green, Frank and Regina Merritt, Stacy Flores, Julio, Madelynn, Lauren and Jordan. First of all, we had never met Julio before and don't know why he was in the meeting. We were also surprised to see Stacy in the meeting, she is just a volunteer and we were never told she would be joining us. All administration and coaches seem to be very uncomfortable with all four families meeting at one time, but they have no problem packing the room with extra coaches.

- This appears to be another bullying tactic, intimidation. They have four couches and a biased AD against a student and parents.

They started the meeting by complaining that Madelynn is telling her friends she is suspended. We stated that she IS suspended and there is nothing wrong with her telling her friends the truth. Her friends were wondering where she was, and she had a right to tell them. They acted surprised that we have called it a suspension and told us it was only a "cool down". As you can see from the emails (1-3), they knew we considered it to be a suspension.

The whole meeting was fairly unproductive, but some highlights of the meeting are below.

Frank denied ever telling Jordan they had planned on calling us to kick Madelynn off the team the night of Aug. 13. Frank denied telling Madelynn that he was going to see whose training (Tom's or his) was better by racing the athletes against each other. Frank denied talking to other parents and athletes about the 4 families that were targeting him. Frank denied telling other parents and athletes about her injury. Frank denied saying that Madelynn had slandered their company.

They claimed Madelynn had been causing division but could give no clear examples. They said parents were contacting them and wanting her to stop reaching out to their kids. Madelynn said she has never done this. She has told her teammates that she was suspended, but she has never sought out to divide the team. \*\*\*REMINDER here, Frank is the one that has been telling kids and parents all summer about 4 families targeting him and dividing the team, not Madelynn.

They tried to put Madelynn on the witness stand and accuse her of things, that had never before been brought up, in front of the 4 coaches and AD. We had been asking what she did wrong for over a week with no answer. To then put a kid on the spot in an intimidating environment like that is not acceptable and Lauren would not let her answer. Any "dirt" they had on Madelynn should have been brought to our attention before any decision to suspend her.

- Intimidating her by putting her on the spot in a room of hostile adults, a violation of the bullying policy.

They claimed we were recording conversations. They asked Madelynn 3 times if she recorded conversations or was conspiring with other kids to do so, she said no. We have never done such a thing either.

They claimed they were told that Jordan wanted to physically harm them. Again, no such thing has ever even been suggested in our house. Jordan is a Special Operations commander in the US Air Force, he would not jeopardize his career to harm a coach over a disagreement.

We asked if they would have open practices to start rebuilding trust and transparency between our family and the coaches. We were told no. What are they trying to hide?

At the end we asked if Maddie could now return to practice since they claimed she hadn't been suspended and it was just a cool down. She had been separated for the 1 week and now we had had the meeting with them. Mr. Green said, "yes, she can return, she was never kicked off." Frank said, "no, we still need to discuss it." We went back and forth on was she suspended or not, and if she wasn't suspended then she met all the requirements and should be allowed to rejoin the team. Mr. Green finally ended the meeting and told us he would let us know by lunch. We had no idea what was left to discuss, but they insisted she had never been suspended, so we left.

Before we left the meeting, Jordan told them that he would be sitting in on the next meeting with Ms. Frakes. She is a widow and did not want to attend the meeting by herself. Lauren had already coordinated with Mr. Smith and Mr. Green, on behalf of Ms. Frakes, to make sure she was allowed to have another adult there for support. On an email, Mr. Smith confirmed that she was allowed to have someone be there with her. Mr. Green was copied on those emails, but when Jordan mentioned he would be in the next meeting, Mr. Green said it was not allowed. Lauren corrected him and said it absolutely was. He relented and agreed. Before the meeting started, Ms. Frakes asked Julio and Stacy to leave. She was told that the meeting was only with the Merritts. Everyone but Julio got upset that she didn't want them all there. They were expecting to have 4 coaches and the AD in a meeting with Ms. Frakes all by herself.

- Another attempt to use intimidation.

Following the meeting, Madelynn told us that Frank had stared her down during the meeting and it had made her feel very uncomfortable. Of course, no one can prove this, and it can be passed off as unintentional. However, Madelynn has been sensitive to something not being right since the beginning of the summer. I do not believe she was imagining this.

- More intimidation.

We never received a response from Mr. Green as he had told us we could expect. Later that night, they emailed us (see email 7) to let us know that the coaches would meet on Sunday to let us know. Again, further delaying decisions. We believe this was because Jordan sat in on Ms. Frakes meeting against their wishes. Every time we misstep, there is more punishment for Madelynn. They also made it very clear that we were not allowed to speak with other parents at the xc meet on Saturday. An attempt to control us.



- More delays in Madelynn's reunification with the team. We have met all of their requirements, except. More isolation and retaliation.

**Saturday, August 19** – Madelynn rode with Ian and Remi Kepran to the meet in Niceville to cheer on her teammates. She said it was very awkward and she felt like the team was treating her differently. Stacy tried to hug Madelynn and she politely refused it. Stacy seemed annoyed that Madelynn would refuse her.

**Sunday, August 20** – We received an email from Regina with Madelynn's stipulations to return (see email 8 and map 9). The requirements further show that they are trying to delay Madelynn's return to the team. They imposed punishment and barriers to her return. They required an apology to the coaches, of which we still have no idea what she did wrong. I can't imagine that a possible rude tone is enough to warrant a suspension, re-signing her sportsmanship agreement and apology letter. They required her to seek clearance for a medical doctor to return to training and competition. We have already sought the advice of qualified sports and medical professionals. No one has ever said she couldn't run/practice, just the Merritts. We are the parents, we are the only ones who have the right to determine the medical care of our daughter. This was another attempt to further delay Madelynn's return to the team.

- Please read the email as if you had been rude to a co-worker (it happens). Would this be an acceptable remedy for your return to work? Please read the email through the lens of the parent of the kid who has been accused (and yet you still don't know what they did wrong). Would this be an acceptable remedy to their return to the team? Would you feel safe sending your child to practice with no oversight?
- The email shows what a hostile environment the XC team has become. It is an unsafe place for Madelynn to return to.
- Mr. Green is apparently in agreement with these stipulations regardless of how they violate the code of conduct policy or bullying policy.
- Mr. Green and Mr. Smith are not holding these coaches accountable for their maltreatment of our daughter and the other 3 students.

**August 27** – Jordan wrote an email to Mr. McQueen, Mr. Moss and Mr. Laatsch requesting a meeting for the four families. Please see emails 11-13. Our concerns were dismissed and we were denied a meeting. No one informed us of proper steps to remedy a complaint. We felt like the door had been slammed in our face.

**August 29** – After Lauren read the Sportsmanship Policy at the end of the athletic clearance, the process for grievances was lined out for us (see sportsmanship policy). Lauren and Madelynn stopped by the Nelson building and requested to see Mr. Laatsch. Mr. Laatsch came to meet us, although he did not seem very comfortable in doing so. Lauren showed him the policy and he did agree to meet with us.

**August 31** – Lauren, Jordan, Ian Kepran and Irina Frakes showed up for our meeting with Mr. Laatsch. We were denied a meeting with all four parents, but Mr. Laatsch and his assistant, Marcia, did agree to meet with Lauren and Jordan. It was very tense and uncomfortable, and we felt like they were attempting to find ways out of meeting with us. Once we finally got into a conference room with Mr. Laatsch and Marcia, we started explaining our story and the tension seemed to leave the room. We all became more comfortable with each other and Mr. Laatsch and Marcia began actively listening to us, asking questions, and taking notes. By the end of the meeting, we felt like we had been heard and their

preconceived ideas that we were crazy parents had dissipated. We believe the original tension had been caused by Mr. Smith and Mr. Green telling Mr. Laatsch that everything had already been handled, all these stories were isolated and we were all helicopter parents attempting to have the coaches fired.

September 1 – Irina Frakes met with Mr. Laatsch, Jordan attended at Irina’s request.

September 7 – Ian and Katrina Kepran and Ambereen Latif met with Mr. Laatsch

Mr. Laatsch followed up the Arnold administration and coaches, but informed us that he had no authority to change anything.

September 12 – Jordan, Lauren and Madelynn were removed from the GroupMe Chat. We have had no formal notification, but apparently she has now been kicked off the team. She has not even been at practice since August 15, but yet they have punished her again. We have been working through the procedures for conflict resolution and have not communicated with the coaches. **More retaliation for not doing as we were told.**

-Madelynn trained hard all summer, sometimes running up to 40 miles/week. She had a goal of making it to state this year. This all being destroyed by this one season of cross-country. A kid’s aspirations and hard work are just as worthy of protecting as an adult’s.

-Madelynn’s punishment is unfair. At most we can assume she had a rude tone, which after all their lies I don’t believe one bit. Is a suspension, apology letter, re-signing the sportsmanship agreement, further isolation from her team all a fair punishment for a rude tone? Will there be a punishment for the Merritt’s **multiple lies, targeting, discriminating, and retaliation?** Again, for some reason, adults in the district don’t seem to think this is a big ask of a kid, but if this was in a workplace, no HR director would allow this. **It is humiliating.**

**-On the subject of humiliation. The Merritts have humiliated and discredited Madelynn by telling many athletes and parents about four families who have been targeting them all summer. Even if names were never mentioned, now everyone knows who the four are. Madelynn has been on a gag order and even criticized for telling her friends she was suspended from the team. She has been made out to be a troublemaker and a problem. Madelynn has a very esteemed reputation, that she takes pride in. They have trashed her reputation amongst the team.**

-Frank told us the 1 week separation was a “cool down”, not a suspension. If it was a cool down, why does she need to apologize? Further proof that they lie to fit the narrative they are pushing and then they twist it around to control, manipulate and punish. If Frank is holding everyone to their word, can’t we hold him to his word that this was merely a “cool down”. Because if it was a cool down, Madelynn did nothing wrong. If it was a suspension, we need clear documented evidence that a suspension was warranted

-They turn every story around to manipulate the situation.

-They said 4 families are targeting them – They were the ones targeting the 4 families

-They said Madelynn is slandering their company – They have been slandering her character/reputation since the beginning of June.

- They said Irina has bizarre behavior and needs to stay away from them – Irina asked them to stay away from her daughter and Regina became unglued at the meeting (bizarre behavior).
- They add “tone” to any conversation and use it against them – They added “tone” to Madelynn’s clarifying question and called it rude. They added “tone” to Madelynn’s attempt to understand what she did wrong and apologize and called it bad behavior. They added “tone” to Jordan’s conversation and said things got heated. There has never been any “tone”. That is the best they can come up with against us. It’s impossible to prove either way, but again, the Merritts’ account of this seems to take precedence.
- Mr. Green said he would stand behind the Merritts. He would not step in based upon “hear say”. However, he is allowing the Merritts to punish these kids based upon “hear say”. There is a double standard here.
- The team is now an unsafe and hostile environment for these four students. There is very strong evidence of targeting, intimidation and retaliation. Under no circumstance should these four students be at practice without a parent being present. Practices should be open to the parents.
- Mr. Green and Mr. Smith have perpetuated the bullying by not stepping in and stopping it. This could have all been stopped on day one if Mr. Green would have just put his foot down and said that all kids were on the team. They have let the Merritts behavior go unchecked and it has resulted in an escalation in their bullying.
- During our meeting with Mr. Laatsch and Marcia, Lauren had a revelation about Madelynn's mental health. We think Madelynn is a happy girl and even the xc situation couldn't get her down. But that's not true. We lived in Northern Italy when Covid first hit. Our kids were confined to our house and yard for 10 weeks. Madelynn became very depressed because of the social isolation. The kids and Lauren ended up leaving Italy and returned to Kansas due to Madelynn’s mental state. We literally split our family up and left an entire continent to save her mental health. Every child has the potential to have a mental health issue. Just this very week, my son’s friend, a 15 y/o boy, committed suicide. Why are we allowing coaches and administrators to heap more harm onto our children?
- When we asked for policies regarding sports so we could evaluate the proper course of action, we were told “sports are a coach’s program”. Essentially telling us the coaches could do whatever they wanted. Since then, we have found multiple policies (on our own) that say otherwise. In the Extracurricular Activities Handbook, Article 8, it states, “All extracurricular supplemented employees are expected to follow all the rules and regulations of the governing bodies that apply to their sponsored activity. Any violations will be punished by the sanctions set forth from the respective governing bodies. These governing bodies include, but not limited to: Bay County School Board Policy, Florida Department of Education, Florida High School Athletic Association, Bay County Student Activity Policy and Guidebook.”
- How long will this go unchecked? How many adult meetings do we need to have to prove they are liars? How many kids have to have their sports dreams/goals crushed? How many kids need to go through this psychological abuse before something is done?