

Weekend party brings criminal charges

How the aftermath affects North

What began as a normal night of hanging out, laughing and drinking ended in charges of Minor In Possession (MIP) for 10 Blue Valley North students on Sunday, Jan. 15.

“It wasn’t even a party,” senior Ben* said. “We were just watching TV. We had a soccer game later that night. Yeah, there was a little bit of drinking going on. All of the sudden we hear ‘Overland Park Police Department’ and see two cops walk down the stairs.”

Police officers individually questioned Ben and his friends, read them their Miranda rights and wrote out a ticket to each for Minor In Possession. To Ben, the experience was surreal.

“You think it can’t happen to you, but it did happen, and it sucks,” he said.

In the state of Kansas, an MIP charge may be issued to any person under 21 who possesses, consumes, obtains or attempts to obtain alcoholic beverages. Johnson County District Attorney Stephen Howe’s office reports that hundreds of juveniles within Johnson County are charged with MIP each year.

Ben and his friends are discovering the consequences of being charged with criminal offenses.

“I’ll have to do 10 hours of community service, there’s a chance I can get my license suspended, and I have to go to alcohol abuse class,” Ben said. “I can’t get in trouble for the next six months—even a speeding ticket. I have to be extremely careful and not do anything wrong.”

Multiple students charged that night are athletes, and an MIP could be a detriment to their seasons under Blue Valley North’s athletics policies.

“There’s a three-step method to the policy,” Athletics Director Mickey Masterson said. “On their first offense, a person would sit out for 20 to 50 percent of their season. The second step is to sit out the next season. The third step is to sit out for a full year.” Masterson declined to comment on the specific consequences of this recent incident.

According to Masterson, Blue Valley North administrators added regulations to district policy to create stricter guidelines.

“Our policy is a little different because it’s 24/7/365,” he said, referring to the policy’s year-

round effectiveness. “People have to understand that if something happens in the summer, it still affects them.”

“One of our players is definitely involved with this,” varsity boys basketball coach Ryan Phifer said. “But there were other people involved, people who don’t play athletics, and people don’t know about that. There’s definitely more of a spotlight on athletes...I don’t think that’s fair.”

Decisions made off the court can affect a team’s performance, raising questions about the direction of North’s basketball team after an undefeated beginning to the season.

“[An MIP] affects things on the court,” Phifer said. “When we’re playing without a certain person, our rotations are different, who we put in the game is different, and it’s different in practice. It might disrupt the rhythm and the timing that we have during games.”

Despite potential challenges, Phifer is optimistic that North’s basketball team can surmount the struggle of temporarily losing a player.

“As a team we need to come together and overcome the loss of a teammate for a few weeks and try to play even harder and better,” he said.

Phifer challenges the friends of students that belong to a team to help keep them accountable and avoid trouble.

“If you’re a friend to somebody that’s part of a team, a really good friend would tell that person to get out of that situation,” he said. “The problem sometimes is that people think you have to be around that kind of situation to be around your friends, and that’s not true.”

Despite past mistakes, all involved seem to agree that second chances are crucial to a student’s future.

“Nobody is here to yell at them or get mad at them, but we want them to be responsible for their actions,” Masterson said. “Our job is to educate, so we have to do a good job of educating people about responsibility and citizenship. We all make mistakes, but we have to learn from our mistakes.”

As for Ben, his disposition toward underage drinking has changed since being charged.

“I definitely won’t [drink alcohol] anymore until college,” he said. “I’ve learned not to do it.”

★ Sarah Evans
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*Name changed to protect students involved

