

June 4, 2009



Mesquite ex-coach indicted on felony charge, accused of pawning more than \$100,000 in school equipment

Mesquite High School's former title-winning football coach was indicted last month on a felony charge related to pawning more than \$100,000 worth of school district equipment.

Police arrested Steve Halpin, 53, on Sunday at his Mesquite home, more than a week after a grand jury in Dallas County indicted him on a second-degree felony charge of abuse of official capacity. The indictment alleges that Halpin "intentionally or knowingly misuse[d] government property" when he pawned district-owned items valued between \$100,000 and \$200,000.

A conviction is punishable up to a \$10,000 fine and a 20-year sentence in state jail.

Numerous phone calls to Halpin weren't returned. An attorney representing him in his divorce case said she didn't know about the criminal investigation or charges against him.

"I'm sorry, but I don't think I'm going to be of any help to you," Paulette Mueller said.

The charge against Halpin stems from a Mesquite police investigation that, at one time, appeared to have fizzled out. A year ago, investigators presented Mesquite ISD officials with evidence linking Halpin to pawning 270 items belonging to the district between January 2007 and April 2008.

School officials initially declined to prosecute, and Halpin retired "due to health problems." But after an internal audit, school officials found items missing from Mesquite High School's inventory and asked detectives in September to resume the investigation.

'Surprised'

In a statement released Wednesday, Mesquite ISD officials said they were "surprised by the severity of the charge."

"Nevertheless, this indictment represents some closure to a situation that is disappointing and upsetting for the district," the statement read.

The police investigation began in spring 2008, when two coaches at Mesquite High School reported several cameras, a laptop computer and a projector had disappeared from their offices. Some equipment then mysteriously reappeared.

Halpin initially denied knowing anything, but when the coaches pressed him about the missing equipment, he admitted taking some of the property, police reports show.

Officers checked the Police Department's pawnshop database, **LeadsOnline**, and discovered Halpin had pawned 270 items at local shops during a year and a half. Logs showed Halpin pawned some items several times, including a district-owned Sony camcorder that police say he pawned three separate times.

June 4, 2009

(con't) Mesquite ex-coach indicted on felony charge, accused of pawning more than \$100,000 in school equipment

Since the police investigation last year, Halpin's reputation and personal life have unraveled, according to those who know him.

Halpin, who won a Class 5A Division I state championship in 2001, pulled out of a potential offer to coach junior-varsity football in Longview. He then resigned as president of the Texas High School Coaches Association, saying he suffered from a gambling addiction and was seeking help.

It's not known what sort of gambling Halpin may have been involved in.

He was registered to own and race horses with the Texas Racing Commission from April 2004 to April 2007.

During the police investigation last year, a Mesquite High coach told officers that Halpin probably pawned the items "for money to take to the track."

Those who know Halpin say he has kept a low profile, especially on Friday nights last fall, when he watched his son, Luke, play quarterback for Mesquite.

"He's careful who he talks to and focuses on trying to get things right," said Jayson Lavender, Mesquite's former offensive coordinator under Halpin.

"I know he's headed in the right direction."

But Lavender and others who know him said they no longer stay in touch.

"He had a tremendous reputation and was someone people looked up to," said a former coach in Mesquite ISD who asked not to be identified for fear of jeopardizing his new job. "I don't think anybody has had anything to do with him."

Suspended

Last summer, the State Board for Educator Certification, a division of the Texas Education Agency that handles teacher certification, suspended Halpin from teaching in Texas public schools until July 2011.

A few months later, his wife, Mary Ann Halpin, filed for divorce and requested a temporary restraining order.

She asked for an accounting of \$270,731 withdrawn last year from the family's retirement accounts, "including an accounting of any losses or winning from any gambling by husband," according to court documents.

Halpin told *The Dallas Morning News* in August that he applied for several college-level coaching positions but didn't get a job offer.

Those who know him say Halpin now paints houses.