

## Will a negative story be allowed to run in a high school newspaper?

As a high school journalist, you have developed several sources of information about the football camp held each year at your school. You hear that brutal hazing is part of athletes' initiation to the team. Investigating further, you learn that new players are subject to various humiliations and assaults, sometimes with broomsticks, electrical cords and socks stuffed with tennis balls.

This is a big, important story. Kids are being hurt. You work hard to get your facts right and spend a great deal of effort checking and double-checking your sources. Your newspaper's adviser supports you and your work. But when you are ready to publish the story in the school newspaper, the principal says you can't run it unless you make substantial changes. You must eliminate a player's comments and add a prepared statement from the football coach. The coach also says this is "negative journalism" and wants you to hold the story until after the playoffs.

### What do you do?

- A. Drop the story. You know you've done a good job, but if the principal won't let you run the story as you have prepared it, you won't run it at all.
- B. Wait until after the playoffs, as the coach requests, and then print the story according to the principal's requirements: Drop the player's comments and run the football coach's statement. At least some of the information you have uncovered will come out.
- C. Print the story as your principal demands, by dropping the player's comments and running the football coach's statement. But add an editor's note at the end of the story, explaining that school officials, including the coach, reviewed the story and insisted that changes be made to it before it was published.

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### The real story

It's fall of the 1999-2000 school year. Marina Hennessy, a student journalist at Avon (Ind.) High School, carefully researches and prepares a story on the hazing practiced by her school's football team, which is ranked No. 3 in the state. With the encouragement of her journalism adviser, Marina submits the story for publication in the school newspaper. When the principal orders the paper to drop the story, the adviser informs the principal that Marina intends to take it directly to the school board and the local community newspaper. The principal relents, but insists on several changes. Marina publishes the story with those changes, but adds an editor's note that reads: "The story was reviewed by school officials, including the coach, and they insisted that changes be made prior to publication."

Marina's hard work and determination eventually pay off. Local media pick up the story and report her findings, adding that the principal had censored her work. In the zeal to prevent "bad news" about the school from coming to light, the principal creates more of a furor. Eventually, the coach of the football team resigns and the football camp, where most of the beatings have taken place, is canceled.

For a while, Marina has to endure criticism from students and other members of the community who seem more interested in the football team's ability to win games than in reports about violence against the players. But for her determination and dedication to this important story, in May 2000 Marina is awarded the Newseum's [Courage in Student Journalism Award](#), which includes a check for \$5,000.