



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on November 10, 2014

High School Football Player Penalized After Acknowledging God

A high-school football player in Florida was given a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty for pausing in the end zone to thank God after he scored his first touchdown of the season October 31 (see video below).

Sam Turner, a 16-year-old senior playing tight end for the Fort Myers High School Green Wave, took a knee in the end zone in thanks to God for the score, and then pointed his finger to the sky — and was immediately flagged by the end zone referee with a 15-yard penalty.



"I felt like I had to thank God for blessing me with the talent and passion to play football," Turner explained to Todd Starnes of [Fox News](#). "So I dropped to a knee and thanked God for everything he's done in my life."

Turner said that he pointed to the sky in memory of a teammate who was murdered last year. It was that gesture, said an official with the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA), that prompted the ref to flag Turner. "It was deemed excessive celebration in a manner that drew attention to the player," the FHSAA's Cory Sobers told Starnes. "I believe the arm motion is what drew the flag and not the kneeling or the prayer."

Sobers told the *Fort Myers News-Press* that the referee's flag was "a judgment call. The penalty is not because he prayed. It's because the official determined he was trying to focus attention on himself and that's the bigger issue in the official's viewpoint."

Turner said he was confused when he looked up from his prayer to see the yellow flag. "I was like, 'Are you seriously flagging me right now? What did I do wrong?'" he recalled to the local paper. "Eventually the ref came up and talked to me and said I was trying to bring attention to myself and I was trying to explain to him that that wasn't the case at all. I wasn't trying to bring attention to myself. I was just trying to thank God."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akr290_xrbk

Turner said that he received a lot of support from teammates, parents, and others after the incident. "It's very cool to see how everyone is taking it," he said. "I use my faith as a platform for my talents. My teammates are giving me tons of support. They all know I'm a strong believer, even though it cost us 15 yards."

While he conceded that the penalty might have been tougher to swallow if it had cost his team the game, in the end Fort Myers defeated rival Riverdale by a score of 49-0.

Turner's football coach, Sam Sirianni, speculated that the referee didn't feel good about throwing the flag, but said, "I don't begrudge the official. You just move on." He added that he had spoken with Turner and was satisfied that "what he did wasn't selfish. He didn't understand it at first. He said it



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shouldn't have been a penalty. He would never do anything disrespectful or do anything that would hurt the team."

Turner's gesture of prayer and thanksgiving is reminiscent of the actions of Tim Tebow, the Heisman Trophy winning quarterback who both in college and the NFL made a point of taking a knee and thanking God with each touchdown he helped his team to score. Throughout his college career he also had the scripture reference "John 3:16" inscribed into his eye black during games — a practice that college athletic officials have since outlawed as distracting and unnecessary.



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