

## NJSIAA bans LEAP for 2 years



DOUGLAS M. BOVITT/Courier-Post file

LEAP Academy boys' basketball coach Marco Morcos was placed on two years probation by the NJSIAA for lack of supervision.

State says school tried to improperly gain an edge

By PHIL ANASTASIA  
Courier-Post Staff

Citing a "conscious attempt to gain an improper athletic advantage," the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association on Monday banned the LEAP Academy University Charter School boys' basketball team from the state tournament for two years.

The NJSIAA's Controversies Committee also placed LEAP coach Marco Morcos on probation for two years and noted that "supervision of the eligibility of the boys' basketball team was virtually non-existent."

LEAP attorney Angelo Genova said the school intends to "vigorously" appeal the NJSIAA's ruling at the organization's Sept. 13 Executive Committee meeting.

"We do not concede that anything was done improperly," Genova said.

LEAP won the South Jersey Group 1 title in March in just its

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## Punch lands Camden probation for 2 years

By WALT BURROWS  
Courier-Post Staff

### CAMDEN ON PROBATION

The Camden High School boys' basketball program has been placed on probation for two years but is still eligible to participate in the state tournament.

The announcement was made Monday by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association.

"I'm definitely happy the situation has come to an end," Camden athletic director Mark Pease said. "We can close the chapter and move on."

The incident that trig-

gered the probation occurred March 7 in the South Jersey Group 3 championship game between Camden and Deptford.

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Rickie Crews as the teams shook hands in the post-game ceremony. Camden Board of Education president Philip Freeman said he was

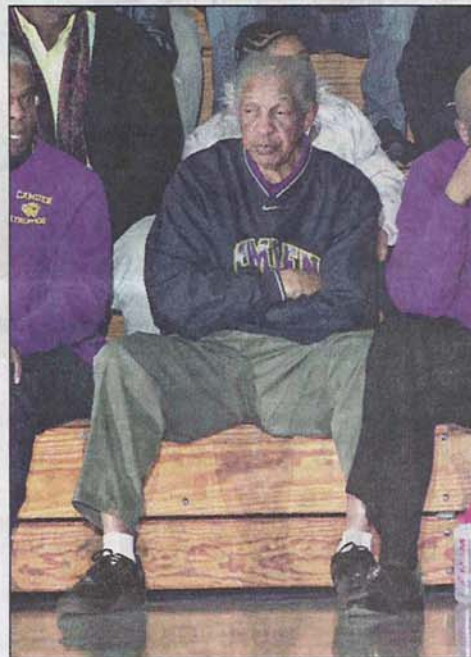
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CHRIS LaCHALL/Courier-Post file

Camden boys' basketball coach Clarence Turner isn't sure what his future holds.

### LEAP BANNED

The NJSIAA Controversies Committee has banned the LEAP Academy University Charter School boys' basketball team from participating in the state tournament in 2007 and 2008 for "a conscious attempt to gain an improper athletic advantage through impermissible recruitment efforts."

Some other aspects of the NJSIAA's ruling:

■ LEAP will be required to submit a Corrective Action Plan as to how it will assure compliance with NJSIAA eligibility standards.

■ LEAP coach Marco Morcos will be placed on probation for two years and required to attend workshops to assure his compliance with standards.

■ A copy of the NJSIAA's decision will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education for that agency's attention, as per "violation of Section 7 and 8 of the Charter School Act".



## LEAP TIMELINE

- **1997:** LEAP Academy University Charter School in Camden issued its first charter.
- **2004:** LEAP offers complete high school program.
- **2005:** LEAP competes in NJSIAA tournament in boys' basketball for first time.
- **March 7, 2006:** LEAP wins South Jersey Group 1 championship in boys' basketball.
- **Monday:** NJSIAA bans LEAP from state tournament in 2007 and 2008 for "clear violations of Athletic Recruitment Rules" during 2005-2006 season.

# LEAP/NJSIAA bans school for two years

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second year as a varsity program.

NJSIAA attorney Michael Herbert said LEAP was not stripped of its South Jersey Group 1 basketball title, despite the use of players who were improperly recruited, "because the committee's thought was that we want to move forward."

Herbert said the case was "beyond simply sports" and indicated that the NJSIAA ruling was being sent to the Commissioner of Education's office.

The NJSIAA contends that LEAP, which is located on Cooper Street in Camden, violated the state Charter School Act, as well as its own charter, by recruiting students outside of Camden for athletic purposes.

The NJSIAA noted that while "81 percent of the student enrollment (at LEAP) were residents of Camden, the majority of the boys' basketball team were residents of districts outside of Camden."

The case centered on the transfer of two students to LEAP from out-of-state schools during the 2005-2006 school year. The students established residency with legal guardians in Pennsauken, according to the NJSIAA report, and enrolled in LEAP.

According to the NJSIAA, both students were ineligible to participate in sports at their previous high schools.

Morcos said after the South Jersey Group 1 title game March 7 that LEAP senior guard Lance James had transferred to the school from Georgia in December because of hardship endured by his family related to Hurricane Katrina.

The NJSIAA ruling noted that one of the students in question "had no association with New Orleans ... was not a Hurricane Katrina victim ... and was, in fact, living with his mother in Georgia."

James, a first-team All-Group 1 selection by the *Courier-Post* who scored 28 points in the South Jersey title game victory over Burlington City, enrolled in

LEAP in December. He established residency in Pennsauken with an uncle, according to Morcos.

The NJSIAA found that a LEAP assistant coach, Pennsauken resident Robert Davis, served as a guardian to two of the school's transfer students.

The NJSIAA said Davis served as a "guardian ... without any proof of a relationship other than an assertion he was somehow an 'uncle' to one of the students."

Pennsauken officials first brought the situation to the attention of the NJSIAA because, under charter school rules, a district must pay 90 percent of the per-pupil tuition when one of its residents attends a charter school.

Pennsauken athletic director Billy Wright testified that "Pennsauken High School was acting as a conduit to LEAP Academy, and we were footing the bill."

Another key LEAP player, junior forward Chauncey Gilliam, was an all-county player at Hammond High School in Columbia, Md., during the 2004-2005 school year, according to the *Washington Post*.

Gilliam scored 18 points in the South Jersey title game.

According to the NJSIAA report, Morcos testified that he had "never met" either of the transfer students or their parents prior to their enrollment at LEAP.

The NJSIAA report said the committee "did not believe Mr. Morcos was totally candid."

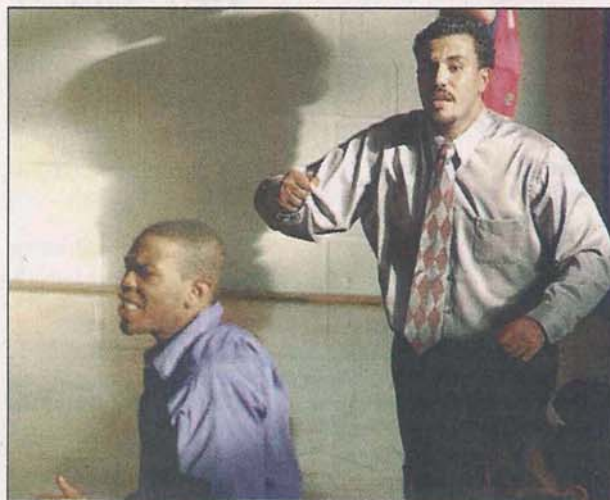
Morcos declined to comment Monday, and LEAP officials referred questions to Genova, the school's attorney.

"We look forward to the opportunity to explain this situation more fully," Genova said.

Genova said LEAP's status as a charter school must be taken into account when evaluating the actions of its officials.

"They are trying to fit a square peg into a round hole," Genova said of the NJSIAA.

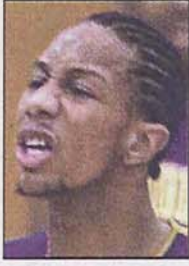
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DOUGLAS M. BOVITT/Courier-Post file

**LEAP boys' basketball coach Marco Morcos (right) and assistant John Louis direct their team against Bishop Eustace during a 2004 game. Their team has been banned two years by the NJSIAA effective immediately.**





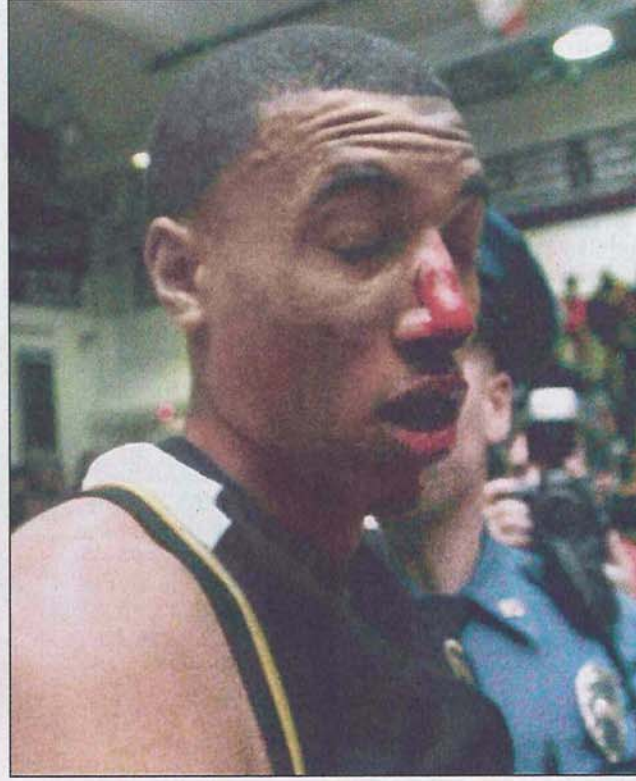
## THE INCIDENT

■ **When:** March 7, 2006

■ **Where:** Eastern High School, Voorhees

■ **What:** During the postgame handshake following Deptford's 60-50 victory over Camden in the South Jersey Group 3 championship game, Panthers senior MacArthur Mason (left) punched opposing player Rickie Crews. After celebrating his team's win (below left), Crews suffered a broken nose (below right) and received seven stitches for the damage. Last month, Mason, 18, pleaded guilty to simple assault and the plea agreement recommended a five-year probationary term.

■ **Quote:** "I had shaken hands with several players and I saw him (Mason) approaching and he had closed his fist but I never expected what happened to happen," Crews said March 7.



Photos by CHRIS LaCHALL/Courier-Post file

# Camden/Boys' team still eligible for postseason play

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"very happy" that more serious sanctions were not issued against Camden, which was banned from the NJSIAA tournament in 1972, 1992 and 1999.

In its report, the NJSIAA's Controversies Committee concluded that coach Clarence Turner and Camden personnel were not responsible for the assault but that tighter supervision must be maintained of the boys' basketball program.

Asked about the decision Monday night, Turner said: "I haven't seen the ruling yet. Whatever they say, that's it. But I think they should not only look at

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**Camden coach Clarence Turner, on the NJSIAA**

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The committee announced that "assuming no repetition of improper conduct by the boys' basketball team, it will be permitted to qualify for the NJSIAA tournament in that sport."

Camden has the right to appeal the ruling at the NJSIAA's monthly meeting on September 13.

■ **Turner's status:** Camden principal Al Davis

originally issued a corrective action plan to the NJSIAA on March 9 that called for Turner's ouster as coach. The Camden board rescinded that plan because it had not received board approval.

The committee ruled that Camden's failure to submit a new Corrective Action Plan resulted in the program being placed on probation for two years, "during which time specif-

ic progress reports are to be submitted."

Freeman said that "as of right now," Turner is the boys' basketball coach.

Turner said Monday night he's taking a wait-and-see approach to returning to the sidelines next season.

"I don't know what the powers to be have in mind," he said. "Just have to wait and see."

Freeman said Davis must submit a recommendation for coach of the team for the 2006-07 season "in the near future."

Staff writer Bob Viggiano contributed to this report. Reach Walt Burrows at (856) 486-2424 or cpsports@courierpostonline.com