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Smh at high school athletes on Twitter

By Keith McShea

News Sports Reporter

If you are reading this on your computer, or your phone, or a screen of any kind, you probably know what smh means. For those reading this in a newspaper and who might not be aware, that's Twitter-speak for "shaking my head." It's one of the many acronyms that have gained popularity as people try convey their thoughts in 140 characters or fewer via the landscape-shifting social media site.

And, when it comes to high school athletes on Twitter, I'm definitely smh.

There's no other way to put this. There are certainly exceptions, but to the majority of Western New York high school athletes on Twitter, I need to tell you something: You look like an idiot.

Now, I know that you are probably not actually an idiot. There are cases where I've talked to some of you and I've seen the way you conduct yourself. I wouldn't think you were an idiot -- until I took a glance at your Twitter timeline.

Before anyone rushes to see who I'm following or who is following me, or who I've tweeted at or who has tweeted at me -- it doesn't matter. I've been covering high school sports via Twitter long enough, and have browsed from one user to the next here and there (just like anyone has) to have been smh all over the Twittersverse.

That includes in New Jersey, where about two weeks ago, senior football player Yuri Wright of national power Don Bosco Prep was expelled by the school because of some extremely inappropriate tweets. There were more than just a few, and they were excessively vulgar.

His Twitter account was "protected," which means his tweets weren't available to anyone who goes to twitter.com -- just people he approved to follow him. However, he had enough followers that the tweets attracted attention, the school didn't like what it saw, and he was expelled.

Here's the thing: I found Wright's tweets on a blog (part of the lesson here is that what you say online sticks around, somewhere, forever). What I found in his tweets wasn't so terribly different than what I've seen from some local athletes.

If I wanted to, I could seriously come up with an All-Western New York Twitter Profanity team. Just in the last week I've read some disgusting stuff.

So you are quoting song lyrics? Doesn't matter. You are retweeting someone else? Same difference. You are responsible for what you put out there, and you are accountable when that makes you look like a you-know-what.

So you see adults using profanity on Twitter all the time? I do too. You know what? They look like idiots, too.

I know we're in an interesting time of words and wordplay. Some of the most popular acronyms on Twitter include an unpublishable word. The most popular pregame music in basketball gyms this season is an infectious-beat-laden track by Jay-Z and Kanye West that has a title that can't be published in a family newspaper.

While the newspaper is one thing, the newsroom is another. Anyone who has spent any time putting a publication together on deadline knows that profanity can be as popular in a newsroom as keyboards and stylebooks. I spend a lot of time in a newsroom, and, like any writer, I freely admit to being a lover of very colorful language. However, you sure won't see @KeithMcSheaBN dropping any you-know-what-letter bombs on Twitter.

That's because it's just as inappropriate on Twitter as it is in a newspaper. Twitter is like one cavernous room where anyone gets to say whatever they want and everyone gets to decide who they are going to listen to. It's also a place where you and your character will be judged, instantaneously, sentence-by-sentence. And once you tweet, it's out there. Forever. Ask Yuri Wright.

I understand that Twitter is how many young people communicate these days. When young people talk to each other, things will be said that might leave adults perturbed or puzzled. That's cool. They're not supposed to get it.

A word of advice: Leave the roughest kind of talk to your text messages, or, here's a thought: when you actually are hanging out with people and the entire world isn't able to listen in. On Twitter, anyone can read it -- teachers, coaches, college recruiters, and yes, the media.

You have the right to use whatever language you want. You have the right to trash-talk people on other teams. But you also have the right to leave people shaking their head every time you do.

kmcshea@buffnews.com