

# Player is Arrested at Junior College Game

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A community college football player was arrested and booked on suspicion of felony battery after he punched a game official in the head, authorities said Sunday.

Police say a scuffle broke out on the field between Ventura College and Mt. San Antonio College players about 8:15 p.m. Saturday. One of the game's officials got into the middle of the scuffle and began guiding Mt. San Antonio lineman Bernard Schirmer back to his side of the field, police said.

But as the referee tried to control Schirmer, "the player punched the referee in the head and knocked him unconscious," the Ventura Community College Police Department said in a statement.

Schirmer, 19, of Long Beach was ejected from the game and escorted off the field into the locker room, authorities said. After interviewing witnesses and conferring with Ventura College President Greg Gillespie, college police officers took Schirmer into custody, police officials said.

Schirmer was booked into Ventura County jail on suspicion of felony battery and released on bail about 7 a.m. Sunday, police officials said.

The injured game official was treated at the scene and released, police said. Ventura College Police Chief Joel Justice said he would not release the official's name. Justice said he did not believe the official plans to press charges.

Mt. San Antonio's athletics website lists Schirmer as a freshman offensive lineman.

In a statement, Mt. San Antonio officials said they believe Schirmer's punch was unintentional.

"Out of frustration, Mr. Schirmer struck himself on the helmet, a habit he often does to calm himself down," the school said. "In doing so, he inadvertently hit the referee and initially believed someone else had done so."

"Mr. Schirmer expressed deep remorse about the incident and any harm to the referee," the statement continued.

A spokesman for the college said Schirmer remains on the team while officials determine whether sanctions are appropriate.

Jim Sartoris, the Commissioner of the Southern California Football Association, which oversees both involved teams, called the incident "highly unusual."

"In my 55 years as a player, coach and [athletic director], I've never seen this happen," he said. "We're still trying to get reports. We'll try to sort it out and decide what really went on and how to deal with it."

Sartoris said the game's referee would not have ejected Schirmer if he felt the punch was unintentional.

The most severe punishment for striking an official is a 16-month suspension from all community-college sports, Sartoris said.

Attempts to reach Schirmer and his family were unsuccessful.

Jimmy Nolan coached Schirmer at Lakeview High School during the tackle's senior season in 2014. He called Schirmer a "gentleman" who didn't say much and was "kind of shy."

Nolan, who now coaches at Fountain Valley High School, said he was "shocked" by video of the punch.

"That's not the guy I remember," he said of Schirmer. "I want to say he didn't mean to do that, but at the same time — he did it."

Back in high school, Nolan said he actually needed to encourage "Big Schirm" to play more aggressively.

"I thought, 'If this guy would just let himself get after it on the field, then there's nobody who can stop him,'" Nolan said. "I was praying for him to be violent. And I thought if the guy could ever be violent, he'd be a scholarship player."