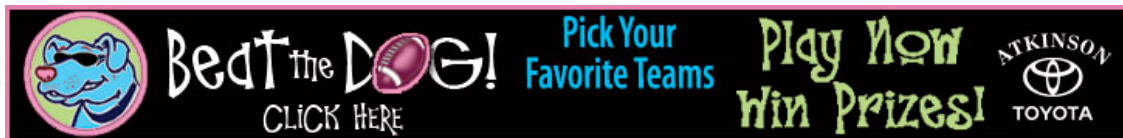


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## Texas prep coach charged with human trafficking

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By **DANNY ROBBINS**  
Associated Press

DALLAS -- An assistant basketball coach at a suburban Dallas high school has been charged with human trafficking for allegedly forcing a student from Mexico to work against his will while living with him, police said Friday.

Lewisville police claim the coach, Theodore Berry, repeatedly threatened the 16-year-old student because the student wouldn't sell gourmet popcorn to help fund a club team operated by the coach. Police say the student's parents paid Berry \$300 a month for their son to live with him, attend Lewisville High School and play basketball there.

Berry, 46, had been working as a teacher and coach at the school 30 miles north of Dallas for about a month when he was arrested on Sept. 28, Lewisville school district spokeswoman Karen Permetti said. He's now on unpaid leave, and the district is in the process of terminating him, she said.

Permetti said Berry was listed as the student's legal guardian when the student enrolled in August. The student has since withdrawn from school, she said.

Police spokesman Kevin Deaver said Berry was charged under a state law that went into effect Sept. 1 that specifically makes forced labor prosecutable as human trafficking. The charge is a second-degree felony and carries a sentence of two to 20 years in prison.

"After talking it over, we saw that this certainly fits the statute," Deaver said.

Police have presented their report to the Denton County district attorney's office, and the matter will be considered by a grand jury, Deaver said.

Denton County jail records show that Berry was released on \$25,000 bond on Oct. 2. The records do not list an attorney, and a working phone number for the coach could not be found.

A police affidavit quotes the student, identified only by his initials, as saying Berry forced him to sell the popcorn at various locations and he was unable to study or do homework because of it. The student claims that when he called his parents to complain, Berry shoved him into a stove top.

Police were alerted when Berry tried to file a criminal mischief charge against the student for pouring popcorn all over the coach's apartment, according to the affidavit.

The student's father told police that Berry, who once coached high school basketball in the Rio Grande Valley, recruited young basketball players from Mexico to the U.S.

The affidavit also says Berry has a criminal history with "several assaultive incidents."

Permetti said Berry's application to the district, submitted in June, showed that he spent the 2010-2011 school year coaching an unspecified club team after previously working as a public high school teacher and coach in La Joya, Mission and McAllen.

Berry received "glowing references" from his previous employers, she said.

Permetti said the district knew he had been involved in two previous assaults. She said he was hired despite those incidents because they weren't recent and he provided "thorough explanations for both."

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