



REALIGNMENT 2018: Class 6A Mock Alignment

VIP By THE OLD COACH - Jan 5, 2018

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Tate Martell could break college football's transfer system

By CHRIS HUMMER - Mon Feb 11 2019

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College football's shifted with the aggressiveness of the new-age transfer market. No player more profoundly represents that than **Tate Martell**.

The former Ohio State and current Miami signal caller was once a recruiting trailblazer of the modern age. Now, the third-year QB is pushing the boundaries of a transfer guideline that's long held firm against immediate eligibility.

Justin Fields is a notable example of this trend. Georgia's freshman backup a season ago, Fields bolted for Columbus this offseason and submitted an appeal the NCAA approved last week for immediate eligibility. Playing time played a role in Fields' desire to depart – **Jake Fromm** wasn't budging off Georgia's starting job – but his appeal centered around an off-field incident at Georgia.

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Martell is a different sort of case.

The former Top247 quarterback loudly proclaimed his intention to compete with Fields before the five-star arrived in Columbus. Yet Martell left Ohio State shortly after Fields' announcement. Martell's transfer reasoning seems simple: He wanted to play and thought he had a better opportunity to do so elsewhere.

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It's what makes Martell's waiver so intriguing. A long-standing NCAA rule states football undergraduate transfers must sit out a year in residence transferring to another FBS program. Fair or unfair – and that's not the question for today – non-graduate athletes can't transfer without penalty on the grounds of playing time. Martell's case could open the floodgates for NCAA policy change and create a precedent that would shake the college football world if approved.

Not that Martell's waiver is simple.

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Publicly, it's presumed Martell will challenge for immediate eligibility citing Ohio State's sudden coaching change from **Urban Meyer** to **Ryan Day**. Martell's lawyer, Travis Leach, has said as much. But Martell's waiver will have more layers than that. You should fully expect Martell to cite a number of previous precedents in his appeal, including potential "egregious behavior" by Ohio State or the more recent modification to the waiver guidelines that allows an athlete to cite "documented mitigating circumstances that are outside the student-athlete's control and directly impact the health, safety and well-being of the student-athlete." Fifty-one of 64 NCAA players who appealed for immediate eligibility since that modification saw their waivers approved, per the most recent NCAA data.

One does not need much mental exercise to connect potential "mitigating circumstances" for Martell to Ohio State's offseason issues with **Urban Meyer** and **Zach Smith**. CBS Sports previously reported Martell considered using those program transgressions as a reasoning for *transfer prior to the season*; one might surmise that was a leak by Martell's camp to show Martell considered transferring before Fields arrived.

"There were some things that happened at Ohio State that we can potentially get some relief from the NCAA, and we're going to try it that way," Leach told the Toledo Blade. "The coaching staff turnover is an issue. There are a few things. There's no real bright-line test that tells you 100 percent how you can get a waiver. This is a tough one, but there are some good facts on his side.

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"You try to throw as much against the way as you can."



(Photo: Joe Scarnici, Getty)

That leads to something many miss with Martell's case. His is not a cut and dry appeal – nobody's is. The NCAA's process is convoluted, so much so a mini-industry's popped up around waivers to help athletes parse the hundred of pages of documents needed to deal with the waiver process.

"People know publicly about certain factors that go into cases, but they don't know everything," said Tim Nevius, a New York lawyer who operates a practice that centers around advocating for college athletes. "The public doesn't know all the facts and circumstances an athlete is dealing with in his or her life that would give the NCAA a basis to grant a waiver."

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Thus, whatever the result of Martell's waiver, it's important to remember his situation is unique. Nobody will have the same set of circumstances as Martell in the future, which makes speculation about any future results hazardous.

That's why athletes are hiring representation.

"The system is stacked against the athletes," Nevius said.

Martell isn't the last notable waiver the college football world will follow this offseason. His is, however, the most important. Martell's case could serve as a spark for significant legislative change. No matter the circumstances Martell cites in his documentation, the reasoning for his appeal is transparent. He wants to play now. His desire to do so could expose flaws in an entire system. If Martell's waiver is granted, it'll inspire a flood of similar cases

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that could lead to the elimination of the year-in-resident requirement, bringing college football one step closer to quasi-free agency.

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