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Gym Teacher Faces Felony

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BROOKSVILLE - BROOKSVILLE - A popular gym teacher faces a felony charge after police say he was driving on a license with a five-year revocation.

Shawn Bingham was arrested Thursday, his second day back on the job at Hernando High School, after clearing his name of allegations he stole cash from a student.

Bingham, 37, says he was moving his car from one side of the school to the other when a Brooksville police officer pulled him over at Howell and North avenues.

That officer, Shawn Terry, reported in an affidavit that he "had knowledge" of the 60-month revocation and that Bingham is a habitual traffic offender.

The track coach was held at the county jail for eight hours until his wife posted a \$5,000 bond.

When reached Friday morning, Bingham said that while he knew his license was previously revoked, he thought it had been reinstated two years ago.

"I thought my license was (cleared)," he said.

The Hernando High School teacher and assistant football coach had been out of work since September after a student accused him of taking \$75 out of a wallet.

Under a settlement agreement approved Tuesday by the Hernando County School Board, he got his job back but accepted two months without pay.

Bingham said he's been told the arrest will not affect his job, and that he simply has to keep district officials "up to date" about the situation.

But school board attorney Paul Carland wasn't so sure.

He said officials in the district's professional standards department are currently in the process of obtaining details and confirmation of the arrest.

The case will then be discussed with Superintendent Wayne Alexander.

"(Teacher arrests) are handled on a case-by-case basis," Carland said. "There's always a concern, but we'll evaluate the circumstances and figure out what we need to do, if anything."

Bingham said he has obtained an attorney and intends to get his record cleared as soon as possible.

"I'm going to go to the Division of Motor Vehicles office today to get this straightened out," he said. "I just want to get back to work and get all of this behind me."

Court records show Bingham has received six traffic citations in Hernando County since 2000, including breaking the speed limit and allowing a minor to not wear a seat belt in his car.

It's unclear at what point a judge assigned the label habitual traffic offender. Terry's affidavit dates the revocation back to 2004 and 2005, citing a missed court date and failure to pay fines.

Records from Citrus County show Bingham's first conviction for driving on a suspended license was in 2002.

That was followed by a felony arrest in 2005 for driving on a suspended license as a habitual traffic offender. Adjudication was withheld, meaning Bingham is not a convicted felon.

His driving record in Hernando County does not include any tickets for reckless driving or DUI.

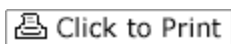
Local attorney Jason M. Melton, who fights traffic tickets, said there are "many, many ways" to become a habitual traffic offender. The most common is three convictions in less than five years of knowingly driving on a suspended license.

The same applies to unknowingly driving on a suspended license. That happens frequently when someone pays off a ticket or fine (which is considered a conviction) but fails to reinstate their license with the department of motor vehicles, Melton said.

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