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Man pleads not guilty in football brawl

STOCKTON - A Riverbank father accused of rushing a youth football player and knocking him to the ground pleaded not guilty to misdemeanor child abuse Friday in San Joaquin County Superior Court.

Cory Petero this time showed up to court promptly.

On Thursday, the 36-year-old was scheduled to appear before Superior Court Judge F. Clark Sueyres, but he walked in with his attorney several minutes late. Sueyres had already ordered a \$25,000 bench warrant for Petero's arrest and refused to hear the case.

In Friday's hearing, this time before court Commissioner Tony J. Agbayani, Petero was ordered to stay away from all youth sports and his alleged victim, 13-year-old Brian Wood of Stockton.

Agbayani revoked the day-old bench warrant and scheduled Petero's next court hearing for Oct. 5.

Over the Labor Day weekend, Petero unwittingly catapulted himself into international headlines when he bolted onto the field at Stagg High School and knocked down the player who made a late hit on Petero's diminutive son. Other parents videotaped the scene.

The Delta Youth Football League this week also banned Petero from coaching or attending any games or league functions. Petero had been an assistant coach for his son's team, the Riveroak Redskins of Riverbank.

Wood's mother, Denise Champion, who observed Friday's hearing, said she didn't see any remorse in Petero's face, adding that she was disappointed prosecutors reduced the charge from a felony to a misdemeanor.

"To plead not guilty is ridiculous," Champion said. "He shouldn't be around children."

San Joaquin County Deputy District Attorney Xapuri Villapudua said she explained to the boy's family that he didn't sustain injuries serious enough to warrant felony prosecution.

Petero's case likely will be resolved before trial because of the videotape evidence, Villapudua said. She wouldn't speculate about possible jail time, because investigators are still looking at injuries other children sustained in the ensuing melee.

A misdemeanor can bring a maximum sentence of one year in the County Jail.

Villapudua also offered insight into the tardiness Thursday of Petero and Modesto attorney Preciliano Martinez: The pair were sitting in her office awaiting the hearing, she said.

"He was six minutes late to court, which usually isn't that big of a deal," Villapudua said Friday.

Agbayani agreed to allow Petero to sit out the next court hearing and instead send his attorney.

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