

Accused drumline member speaks out on hazing charges

By Glen Ryan Tadych

Texas State University's second run-in with hazing in two years stepped out of the Greek spotlight, shifting attention to the marching band without inside light shed on the initial incident—until now.

Thirteen members of the Texas State drumline were arrested in September for allegedly hazing freshman line members. Luis Pereira, one of the accused, came forward to dispel “twisted” information surrounding his and the other students’ arrests.



From left to right, top to bottom: Brian Lindsey, Caleb Garza, John Edds-Galindo, Nathan Donahue, John Corbitt, Cesar Gonzalez, Jeremy Gonzalez, Daniel Burow, Austin Baker, Luis Ramos, Miguel Perez, Luis Pereira and Markus Bonilla

Photo credit: [Texas News](#)

Events of Aug. 31 and Sept. 1

At approximately 7:30 p.m. Aug. 31, Pereira and the 12 accused arrived at the Pleasant Street Parking Garage to meet freshman members dressed in white T-shirts with bandanas in hand, Pereira said. He could not recount how many freshmen were present. For the next hour and 45 minutes, upperclassmen watched as the freshman participated in duck-duck-goose and other “fun” activities, the identities to which Pereira did not specify.

Before leaving the garage, freshman students were instructed to individually blindfold themselves before entering the upperclassmen’s vehicles.

“We (the 13 accused) never blindfolded anyone,” Pereira said. “They did it themselves.”

Pereira said they departed the garage at about 8:45 p.m. arriving at the party, held at Copper Beech Townhomes on Mill Street, after 9 p.m.

During the party, veteran drumline members gave the freshman nicknames, writing them on the backs of the students’ shirts, on which the veterans also signed their nicknames.



(Top) Entrance to the Pleasant Street Parking Garage where the Aug. 31 events began, (bottom) Upperclassmen met freshmen students on the second floor of the garage

Photo credit: Glen Ryan Tadych

Daily Crime and Fire Log.

According to an individual who requested anonymity, they attended the party and later spoke with the female student, who was taken to Central Texas Medical Center via ambulance, after which police confiscated her T-shirt.

“She said when they went to the hospital, they didn’t do any blood tests to determine if she had alcohol poisoning. They just gave her a bunch of water and sent her home.”

After questioning, Pereira was dismissed and given contact information for UPD Investigator Rolando Belmares, whom he made several attempts to contact in the following week.

Investigation

On Sept. 10, Pereira said he was pulled out of wind symphony rehearsal by Belmares and taken to the UPD station for further questioning.

At approximately 3:55 p.m. Sept. 18, five minutes prior to marching band rehearsal at Jowers Fields, Caroline Beatty, Texas State director of bands, arrived with four UPD officers to remove the drumline from rehearsal so all members could be questioned, Pereira said.

An officer asked Pereira how he could be sure the freshmen did not think they were in danger on the night of the party, and that they were not going to be injured or killed.

“There’s trust,” Pereira said. “We’re all friends and we’ve all been together since before school started. You’re struggling out there in the heat (in marching band), becoming a team. There’s a trust there between all members.”

Questioning lasted from about 4 to 7:30 p.m., Pereira said.

On Sept. 19, the Hays County Sheriff’s Office notified each of the 13 upperclassmen that warrants had been issued for their arrests, Pereira said.

According to *The University Star*, Austin Baker, Daniel Burow, John Corbitt, Nathan Donahue, John Edds-Galindo, Caleb Garza, Brian Lindsey, Pereira and Miguel Perez turned themselves over to the authorities Sept. 20. Markus Bonilla, Cesar Gonzalez and Jeremy Gonzalez turned themselves in Sept. 23.

All students were released on personal recognizance bonds the day of their arrests. Each student posted \$2,000 for one count of hazing. Bonilla and Cesar Gonzalez each posted an additional \$6,000 for one count of furnishing alcohol to a minor. Ramos posted an additional \$2,000 for one count of providing false information to a police officer, which according to Pereira, regarded where the party took place as it was Ramos’ apartment.

Response

Pereira said all 13 students received an interim suspension from the marching band Sept. 16, prohibiting them from attending rehearsals and any performances, including football games. The suspension was lifted Oct. 23.

“We’ve missed so many rehearsals and performances that we’ve failed the course,” Pereira said. “I’m considering changing (from music education) to music performance not only for the sake of finishing school on time, but also because of the potential difficulty in finding teaching work now.”

Beatty, Kyle Glaser, associate director of bands, and Kari Klier, marching percussion coordinator, were unable to comment on the situation. According to Joanne Smith, Texas State vice president of student affairs, this is because faculty members “do not discuss individual student issues with others,” and the issue is a department academic internal matter.

In response to the investigation, Smith said people do not realize that any hazing activity,



(Top) Sign outside Copper Beech Townhomes on Mill Street, (bottom) Building 31 of the complex where the party was held

Photo credit: Glen Ryan Tadych

whether minor or major, is illegal in Texas.

“It can be any organization, not just the Greek community,” Smith said. “It’s all defined as hazing, so we have to treat it as such.”

The Texas State hazing memorandum, issued Sept. 11, states hazing is defined by state law as:

“Any intentional, knowing or reckless act, occurring on or off the campus of an educational institution, by one person alone or acting with others, directed against a student, that endangers the mental or physical health or safety of a student for the purpose of pledging, being initiated into, affiliating with, holding office in, or maintaining membership in an organization whose members are or include students at an educational institution.”

Pereira disputed the students’ actions as hazing, as opposed to the image perceived by various news outlets and Texas State administration.

“It wasn’t an initiation,” Pereira said. “We all knew each other and had been drumming together for months. It was just a social gathering where we all had fun.”

Smith stated in an interview with KTBC TV that “the (upperclassmen) had (the freshmen) on their hands and knees, and they had to put their face in the crotch of one the (upperclassmen).”

In response to this allegation, the anonymous individual from the party clarified that when freshmen received their nicknames, they got down on their hands and knees for the upperclassmen to write the name on the backs of their shirts. Jeremy Gonzalez was sitting on a couch at this time.

“Yes, (the freshmen) were on all fours, but not forced on all fours,” the individual said. “(The freshmen) were facing (Gonzalez), but they weren’t in his groin. Their faces were never touching.”

In a KXAN Austin [video segment](#), Chris Sadeghi stated the 13 students’ charges included “serving alcohol to minors, forcing them to drink and do other lewd acts.”

Nicholas Marquez, a former Texas State student and drumline veteran, said what is being talked about in the media is unfair. Marquez wasn’t present at the Aug. 31 party, but speaks from his experience with the organization.

“There’s underage drinking all around Texas State every day,” Marquez said. “I think the Greek community is well-respected at Texas State, but they have parties on and off campus all the time. The drumline has one annual party to reward rookies for their hard work and they get destroyed. To wrongfully accuse the drumline publicly without getting two sides of the story is wrong.”

J.J. Wren, a spring 2011 Texas State music education graduate, became a member of the drumline in fall 2006. He said rookie celebrations were always optional, remembering he did not even stay for the duration of his group’s party, for which he did not receive criticism.

“There were skits where the freshman could make fun of the upperclassmen, but no one was forced to do anything,” Wren said. “My girlfriend at the time wasn’t feeling well, so I left before the skits to tend to her and no one gave me flack for it.”



(Left) Entrance to Butler Hall at Texas State, (bottom) The rear parking lot where the initial police report was filed

Photo credit: Glen Ryan Tadych

John Nelson, associate band director at Cy-Fair High School, attended (Southwest) Texas State beginning in 1990 and graduated in 1996. He marched in the Bobcat Marching Band drumline from 1990 to 1994. Nelson said because there is a lot of attention on the alleged hazing situation, it is difficult to say what will come of it.

“When something like this blows up, nothing you do is going to look good,” he said. “The way public opinion is being shaped today is that ‘initiation’ is a bad word, so now, all these groups are being challenged by traditions.”

Despite having support for his alma mater, Nelson emphasized that it is up to the justice system to convict these students, not the public.

“When an incident like this falls into the county’s lap, there’s surely something present leading them to suspect something serious is going on,” Nelson said. “You have to trust their judgment.”

Update: With the exception of Baker, hazing charges have been expunged for all those accused as of May 2016. Ramos' additional charge for providing false information was also expunged. Bonilla and Cesar Gonzalez's alcohol charges were dismissed on 1/28/16.