

Appeal

Dear [REDACTED],

I am requesting an NCAA Legislative Relief Waiver so that I may be allowed to play basketball for the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) without having to sit out the 2014-15-basketball season. I am requesting the waiver because I was compelled to leave Loyola University Chicago due to undue stress caused by the head coach.

Scholarship held overhead:

Coach Sheryl Swoopes told the Loyola Women's basketball team that she was going to be making cuts at the end of the season. This caused the team to be fearful of everything, which in turn made the environment extremely hostile. However, there were a select few players on the team including myself that Head Coach Sheryl Swoopes subjected to constant threats that she might take our scholarships away. And the threats increased in frequency and intensity as the season wore on. Any mistake made at practice, playing poorly in a game, anything we did that she didn't approve of or like was enough to elicit the threat, with reminders of how what I just did or didn't do was making her decision about who to cut easier. Her threats were not empty ones either. She had already summarily fired an assistant coach/ post coach, [REDACTED], in the summer, without explanation. The team assumed it was because he had threatened her authority. A few days before he was fired, she berated him in front of the team for stopping a drill to teach us something, without asking her permission as the head coach. He was fired soon after that. In mid-season she cut a player that she had asked to transfer to Loyola one month after she arrived, a player who had become one of my closest teammates. So when she told me my scholarship was in danger and I wasn't necessarily coming back next season I believed her and it made me extremely anxious and truly fearful about what would happen to me if I lost my scholarship. I felt uncomfortable to go to the administration regarding my concerns for an appeal if I did lose my scholarship due to the fact that when Grace Calhoun (the AD) was hired she terminated a majority of the athletic department staff and Swoopes was her hire and Swoopes seemed to be doing the same thing with the team which didn't give me confidence about the appeal process. In addition,

Hostile Environment:

Coach Swoopes played mind games with the team that created a hostile environment where I didn't feel I could trust any of my teammates making me feel isolated and increasing my anxiety even more. She encouraged teammates to turn on each other and snitch to her to protect themselves or score points with her at the expense of their teammate. This appeared to apply to the coaching and training staff as well. No one was safe from being snitched on. I wasn't able to talk or vent to any of my teammates because I feared they would relay whatever I said, out of context, to Swoopes who might use it as a reason to cut me. I also couldn't go to my coaches or trainers because if Swoopes found out they were talking to me, 'behind her back' they risked losing their jobs.. For example when I started to speak to the director of basketball operations,

██████████, mostly through text, when we were on the bus and at the end of every conversation she told me to delete the messages in case anyone found them.

My fears were born out by on numerous occasions, but I am including two particularly bad incidences to illustrate the situation.

The first involved my mom and coach REDACT (the donut phone call incident).

- My team was on the road for a game. We were at Chili's, which was next door to a Krispy Kreme donut shop. The red light was on which indicated free donuts. Three of my teammates decided they wanted to get some. But they were too afraid to ask directly and had the managers ask for them. Swoopes said, "If you want donuts, then go." I immediately said "guys sit down, it's a trap." I believed it was a trap because all season she had been playing mind games with us and I never knew if what she said was legit or if she meant something else. Three of my teammates decided since she said yes technically they could go. Once they got back with their donuts Swoopes told us on the bus that we were all in trouble for allowing them to get donuts a day before a game. She then threatened our scholarships on top of the scolding. I had been under a lot of stress and this once a final straw for me. When I got back to the hotel I had to talk/ vent to someone and with no one on the team to do that with I decided to call my mom. I told her what had been happening recently including the donut incident that had just happened. My roommate came back and I had to hang up on my mom. She was worried about me because I was crying and upset about everything. She called my assistant coach ██████████ without my knowledge. ██████████ told her at the beginning of the year that she could call her for anything and it would be in confidence. My mom called her without realizing what time it was and she also didn't know ██████████ was in a meeting with the other coaches including coach Swoopes. My mom began the conversation with "can this be in confidence." What she meant was in confidence from me because my mom knows I hate it when she goes behind my back to talk to my coaches. She told ██████████ she was worried about me and about how the donut incident that just happened threw me over the edge. What my mom didn't know was that Swoopes had made ██████████ conference her in without my mother's knowledge. The next day before the game during our pre game talk Swoopes mentioned that someone's parents had called complained. I thought I had dodged a bullet, since my parents wouldn't do something like that. I didn't play that game, even though I had had an amazing week of practice. I didn't know why I was on the bench even though I had been getting a lot of playing time in the previous games. I didn't question it. I just thought she was mad at me for some reason, since she never communicated with me. I just assumed she didn't want to play me because she didn't like me. When we arrived back in Chicago

on the bus I was told my parents and I have a meeting with Swoopes the following day regarding the phone call. The next day I went into the meeting with my mom and my dad (my dad was on speaker phone because he was working and couldn't make it). When the meeting started Swoopes had a notepad with bullet points she wanted to address. She asked my mom to explain what she had done but she didn't know she had done anything wrong and on top of that English is my mom's second language. Swoopes didn't care what my mom said she rolled her eyes and berated my mom in front of me because of information she had misinterpreted in the first place. I tried to explain my mom wasn't questioning Swoopes's authority. She was just worried about me. I had to watch my mom get ripped to shreds and I couldn't do anything about it due to the fact I was already on thin ice and didn't want to give Swoopes another reason to not renew my scholarship so I felt forced to take Swoopes's side and not my mother's. She then dismissed my mom and continued to talk to me. Swoopes and assistant Coach J told me to stop talking/ venting to her or anyone else in my family. I didn't know who I was supposed to turn to for support I wasn't allowed to talk to my family anymore and I couldn't talk to my teammates or my coaches because they were all fearing for their jobs/scholarship. And when I did talk to my DOBO it had to be in secret.

The second was when the teammate who was cut, texted me and the information in the text got out and two of Swoopes's favorites went to her with the information. A special team meeting was called.

These special team meetings were a regular arbitrary occurrence specifically for those who weren't her 'favorites'. I was repeatedly singled out for 'team meetings' and humiliated in front of the team. In this particular team meeting, before Swoopes even said anything, the two girls who had gone to her high fived and said "we got her (her being me)." The team meeting ended up being me against the whole team. Swoopes started to yell and berate me in front of the whole team, essentially for remaining friends, with the girl she had just cut and my teammates were encouraged to yell at me too and 'speak their mind'. Assistant coach [REDACTED] stood up for me while Swoopes sat back and encouraged my team to continue attacking me. And when it was my turn to speak and provide my side of the story my words were ignored She believed the players that went to her, as she always did. I was going to be guilty in her eyes no matter what I said. It was not fair treatment either. I just cracked after the meeting and couldn't stop crying. We had practice right after this meeting and because I was hysterical my director of basketball operations [REDACTED] took me to the bathroom to calm me down which took all practice.

If you were lucky enough to be her favorite it didn't matter what mistake you made big or small you were not subjected to special team meetings.

She would ask you to come to her office and she would talk to you away from the team.

The stress I was feeling was also amplified by the coach's general behavior toward me. By the second half of season Swoopes would just give me dirty looks. These looks became a regular thing. I recall one time in particular during a team meeting toward the end of the season, where she was going over the rules for next year. After she read one rule in particular which was her 3 strikes and you are out rule (if you mess up once it's a warning; twice, it's a suspension; third time you are automatically cut no questions asked). After she read that she turned, looked directly in my eyes and stared at me for no less than 20 seconds. Other teammates asked me what I did for her to look at me like that and I told them I had no idea and really believed at that moment she was going to cut me from the team.

She also stopped providing positive or constructive feedback. My level of anxiety was intensified further when she stopped giving me any kind of encouragement and only told me how lazy I was and how I never gave enough effort. One time in particular we had a home game where I worked my butt off. I had scored 20 points but my rebounds were lacking. I had not had proper training for rebounding (especially since the post coach was fired) and was trying really hard to improve my numbers. She didn't put that into perspective or teach me, instead she told me I was lazy and didn't care. At the end of the game she went around telling my teammates how well they played individually and completely skipped me. One of my teammates said she wanted to congratulate me on having a 20-point game and how I played really well. Swoopes told her my rebounding was pathetic and I don't deserve any praise.

She stopped high fiving me when I went to the bench regardless of how I played. If someone else messed up and she yanked them off they still would get a high five. This kind of treatment only fueled more stress and caused me to believe even more strongly that I wasn't getting my scholarship renewed

After the season had ended before my individual meeting I asked for my release because I was convinced I was getting cut and wanted to start talking to other coaches as soon as possible, while they still had scholarships to give; so I would had somewhere to go. By the end of the season I felt uncomfortable and was convinced that Swoopes hated me.

Academics:

- I was mentally fatigued and all this stress fed into my academics. I have a learning disability called Executive Functioning Disorder, which is an anxiety-based disability. The more stress I have the worse the disability gets. I believe that due to the stress I was under all season and the constant fear if felt I couldn't and didn't perform in the classroom the way I wanted or was capable of. Further, I have a 504 and Loyola didn't give me the information about what the 504 entitled me to in terms of support. Support which I subsequently got after

transferring. For example I had no idea I could have the accommodation of a mental aid for tests and quizzes and once I visited other schools I found out what else my 504 entitled me to which could have helped a lot.

- My academic needs were not a priority. One time in particular a few of my teammates and I went to our athletic advisors and were told we were not a priority and that the track team was. My advisors also let me schedule a class that met once a week on Thursday nights, which were travel days. When I asked to drop the class after a few weeks because it was too hard to catch up with the class even with the tutor I was going to. When I asked to drop the class, which I should have been advised not to take in the first place, she argued with me. Because I was struggling to catch up with that one class I started to struggle with another class that was in my major. After a lot of convincing I finally dropped that class so I could focus on my biology class in particular.

Over training:

- My team was also being over trained all year. We were being over trained to a point where in the trainers room the doctors and trainers were saying how we were being over worked and that's why my teammates and my body were falling apart. All my injuries were due to over use. I had stress fractures, which caused other injuries because my body had to start to compensate for the parts that were hurt. I was at a point in the season where I was in unbelievable shape. I could run for days and my lungs wouldn't give out but my body and the rest of my team's bodies were falling apart. When we lost, Swoopes blamed it on us being out of shape, and made us run more and do more sidelines, which were the reason a lot of us had stress fractures to begin with. It was a vicious cycle of running for punishment and not getting the proper rest for the amount of stress she put on our bodies. She would say if you are hurt sit out it's your decision. But if you did everyone believed you were at risk of losing your scholarship and Swoopes had made it clear to us that if you weren't playing or running you were at risk of being cut. So everyone including me, pushed through the injuries that in turn made us breakdown even more and cause more injuries. I also wasn't getting the proper medical treatment. I was apparently not priority in the trainer's room either. I was given the basic treatment and exercises to get rid of the stress fracture and the rest of my injuries. But even when they had me sit out for 5 weeks in the beginning of the season the stress fractures kept coming back. They never tried to figure out why this was happening.
- When I transferred to UIC the doctor at my check up asked about tests I should have gotten and was surprised I hadn't gotten any blood work done to see if something else was causing me to get these stress

fractures. She ordered blood work to be done which should have been done last year.