



National Headquarters 1825 K Street NW Suite 200 Washington, DC 20006 (202) 797-8600
West Coast Office 555 12th Street Suite 1620 Oakland, CA 94607 (510) 622-8150

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Deborah Mathis, Communications Director, at (202) 797-8600 Ext. 246

SECOND FORMER COACH SUES FLORIDA SCHOOL FOR RETALIATION FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY ACCUSED OF VIOLATING FEDERAL LAW, RETALIATING AGAINST FEMALE COACHES

A second female former coach at Florida Gulf Coast University has joined a federal retaliation lawsuit filed against the school by Public Justice, the national public interest law firm.

Holly Vaughn, who designed the FGCU women's golf program and built it into Division II tournament-winner, charges that, like former head volleyball coach Jaye Flood, she was subjected to threats and intimidation from school officials because she spoke out about gender inequities in the university's athletic program.

"The students I coached—my players—deserve so much better than they are getting and my fight is, foremost, for them," said Holly Vaughn. "I joined this lawsuit to stand up for what's right and fair for the student-athletes who put their hard work and good faith into FGCU's athletic program. It's not too much to ask that the university treat its female coaches and student-athletes with the respect they deserve."

With Monday's filing in U.S. District Court in Fort Myers, Vaughn becomes a co-plaintiff in the federal lawsuit filed by Public Justice in January on behalf of Flood, who was suspended, investigated and fired by FGCU, despite the best win-loss record in FGCU's history and recognition as this year's Atlantic Sun Conference "Coach of the Year."

The suit charges the school with retaliating against the women because they challenged the school's compliance with Title IX, the law that prohibits gender discrimination in programs at educational institutions receiving federal funds.

"Rather than taking the female coaches' complaints seriously, the university went on the attack, looking for ways to shut them up and get rid of them," said Public Justice attorney Adele Kimmel, co-counsel in the lawsuit. "The university's blatant retaliation makes it the poster child for what NOT to do in response to a Title IX complaint."

After a stint on the professional women's golf tour where she was a finalist in the 1994 U.S. Women's Open, Vaughn came to FGCU in 2000 and promptly turned a fledgling women's golf program into the third highest ranked Division II program in the country.

The lawsuit, amended to include Vaughn's claim, says she was repeatedly rebuffed by sports administrators when she pointed to discrepancies like inadequate facilities for female athletes and coaches. Once, the suit says, Athletic Director Carl McAloose responded to her gender equity questions by saying, "If you don't like it here, you can get the hell out."

Things grew worse for Vaughn after she, along with the other female coaches at FGCU, provided information for a letter written by FGCU's former Interim Athletic Director Merrily Dean Baker (the "Baker letter") that discussed gender inequities in the athletic department. Vaughn was then subjected to a false performance appraisal that unjustifiably criticized her, public dissemination of the false performance appraisal, and ostracism from the Athletic Director. Unwilling to continue beating up against a brick wall, Vaughn resigned in October 2007. She now works as a golf pro in Naples, Florida.

"There is nothing subtle about the retaliation these coaches endured," said Linda Correia, Public Justice cooperating counsel in the lawsuit. "Coach Vaughn could have put FGCU in her rearview mirror, but she recognized that the environment there does not live up to the promise of Title IX."

Even as the university holds fast in its denials about the former coaches' gender inequity claims and the retaliation charges, a drumbeat of grievances from female employees at the school grows louder.

Last month, Wendy Morris, FGCU's former General Counsel, filed a federal lawsuit charging the university with retaliating against her after she refused to go along with the Athletic Director's efforts to oust Flood and expressed concerns about possible gender discrimination and retaliation in the athletic department. Morris's suit says the university abruptly changed her job duties, shut her out of reviewing the Baker letter, then fired her.

"As more female employees come forward and stand up for their right to advocate for gender equity without fear of reprisal, the university will have to face up to its shameful conduct and make amends," said Kimmel.

Note: A photo of Holly Vaughn and a copy of the complaint are attached to this email.

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Public Justice is America's public interest law firm. Dedicated to using trial lawyers' and other attorneys' skills and resources to advance the public good, Public Justice is supported by - and can call on -- a nationwide network of more than 3,000 of the nation's top lawyers to pursue precedent-setting and socially significant litigation. It has a wide-ranging litigation docket in the areas of consumer rights, worker safety, civil rights and liberties, toxic torts, environmental protection, and access to the courts. Public Justice is the principal project of The Public Justice Foundation, a not-for-profit membership organization headquartered in Washington, DC, with a West Coast office in Oakland, California. The Public Justice web site address is www.publicjustice.net.