



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on November 20, 2017

## ACLU Questions College Over Dismissal of Muslim Basketball Player

The ACLU has inserted itself into a conflict between a Kansas junior college and a Muslim student who was dismissed from the school's basketball team after he continued to shoot baskets during the National Anthem prior to a game in early November.

As reported by the *Garden City Telegram*, 19-year-old Rasool Samir, a member of the men's basketball team at Garden City Community College (GCCC), stayed on the court after the rest of his team had returned to the locker room during the playing of the National Anthem.



While those in attendance in the stands at Conestoga Arena for the GCCC Broncbusters game on November 1 stood at attention during the National Anthem, Samir stayed on the court alone and continued to shoot baskets, prompting a local fan, Jim Howard, to come out of the stands to confront Samir for his apparent disrespect of the American flag.

"The two exchanged heated words, and a campus police officer had to separate the pair, with Howard reaching to grab Samir several times," reported the *Telegram*. Samir was escorted off the court and Howard went back to his seat "to applause from several in the stands."

Howard, a longtime member of the Broncbusters Athletic Association, told the paper: "I've had enough of disrespecting our flag. I've been raising money for 32 years for this college, trying to help pay for scholarships for these kids. If they're not going to respect our flag, then they need to get off of our campus and out of Garden City."

Explaining his motivation in confronting Samir, Howard said, "I wanted him off the court, and I wanted him out of this gym. If you're going to disrespect the flag, get out of here." He added: "If this kid stays, I hope nobody ever donates another dime to this college."

Howard apparently got his wish, as, the day after the incident, the team's coach, Coach Brady Trenkle informed Samir, who was sitting out this season with an injury, that he was no longer on the team, and the school gave Samir an airplane ticket back home to Philadelphia.

According to the *Washington Post*, "the school said Samir was dismissed for a team rules violation, because he did not leave the court with his teammates. John Green, Garden City's athletic director, told the *Telegram* that the decision to leave school was Samir's."

The *Post* reported that Samir apologized before his departure, insisting that he hadn't intended "any disrespect at all to the fans or the flag.... I am truly sorry to anyone that felt disrespected, and I am also sorry to the school. I apologize for what happened."

However, shortly after leaving the school, Samir contacted the ACLU, claiming that, contrary to GCCC's story, he was told that, not only was he off the team, but he had to leave the school as well.



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The ACLU's Kansas franchise quickly responded with a [letter](#) to Green, asking for clarification of the actions toward Samir, and charging that the school had offered two conflicting explanations. "We believe any disciplinary action against Mr. Samir for abstaining from the anthem is antithetical to our American values and a violation of his First Amendment rights," wrote Lauren Bonds of the Kansas ACLU. "However, we understand that the GCCC has proffered two alternative explanations for Samir's departure from the team. I am writing to clarify GCCC's position on this matter and request any information you can provide that would help allay our concern that Samir was unlawfully dismissed for exercising his constitutional rights."

Bonds also took a stab at excusing Samir's actions, stating that he "refrained from participating in the anthem because he is a Muslim and his faith prohibits acts of reverence to anything but God." However, Bonds ignored the fact that her client stayed on the court while his teammates made their way to the locker room during the anthem, and that he continued to shoot baskets on the court during the patriotic observance — actions that most people would interpret as disrespectful.

In her letter Bonds said the ACLU wants GCCC to document, among other things, that Samir was not kicked off the team for refusing to salute the flag, was not ordered out of the arena "for asserting his right to abstain from the anthem," and "was dismissed from the team due to a violation of team rules that carries the penalty of dismissal."

As of this writing the college has not publicly responded to the ACLU, and has referred all questions surrounding the incident to its attorneys.

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