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Volleyball Player Punished for Conservative Views Sues Oklahoma University

One would think that the University of Oklahoma would be proud of Kylee McLaughlin, a star athlete on the women's volleyball team, a model student, and a Christian.

In fact, McLaughlin was the Gatorade Volleyball Player of the Year in the state of Texas during her senior year in high school. She continued building on her prolific accomplishments at the University of Oklahoma, where she earned honors as All-Big 12 first team as a junior.

All of that did not matter to her coaches, Lindsey Gray-Walton and Kyle Walton, who apparently did not approve of her political opinions, which are conservative. They allegedly excluded her from team practices, told her that she did not match their "culture," and pressed her to transfer out of the program. Yet, when she entered the transfer portal (although she had a year left of eligibility, McLaughlin had already graduated and was desirous of working on a master's degree), UCLA refused to offer her a scholarship, after initially expressing interest.

As a result, McLaughlin filed suit in federal court against her coaches and the University of Oklahoma, taking advantage of a state law which allows, under certain conditions, such lawsuits, with a waiver of the state's 11th Amendment sovereignty rights.

In its non-discrimination policy, O.U. claims it does not discriminate based on an individual's religion or political beliefs, yet that is exactly what O.U. is doing, according to the complaint filed on McLaughlin's behalf by Norman attorney Stan Ward. The following information is from the federal lawsuit filing:

During the Covid-19 pandemic, McLaughlin's coaches required all members of the team to participate in discussions about white privilege and social justice. As part of this process last June, they were made to watch a documentary called "13th" about racism and slavery. Coach Kyle Walton asked McLaughlin to state her opinion about the video, to which McLaughlin replied she agreed 100 percent that slavery was wrong and slaves were mistreated. But McLaughlin also opined that the video was slanted "left," and that it was critical of then-President Donald Trump.



Photo: garymilner/E+/Getty Images



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McLaughlin was also queried about the movie's assertion that blacks were incarcerated at a higher rate than other racial groups, and what she thought about that. She replied that was mostly for marijuana and other drug crimes.

Another player, Sanaa' Dotson, posted a tweet in support of Black Lives Matter, copying McLaughlin's statements about the movie, adding the comment, "things a racist person says."

About this time, there was a controversy about the University of Texas fight song, "The Eyes of Texas," with some arguing in the aftermath of the George Floyd riots that it was "racist" because decades earlier it had been used in minstrel plays. McLaughlin posted an emoji of a laughing clown on ESPN's report on the controversy over "The Eyes of Texas."

Players from both the University of Texas and the University of Oklahoma made negative posts about what McLaughlin had said, and shortly thereafter Coach Gray-Walton ordered her to take down the post, which argued that "The Eyes of Texas" was not racist. She allegedly talked to McLaughlin about her "white privilege."

Two days later, Gray-Walton sent out a group text discussing Black Lives Matter and George Floyd. Within the text, she said, "(W)e can disagree and still love each other, unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist."

Then, the complaint alleges, McLaughlin was told during a June 15 meeting with the Psychological Research Organization (PRO) by other players and coaches that she was a racist and a homophobe. Kyle Walton told her, "Not sure I can coach you anymore." One teammate told McLaughlin that she should get permission from her teammates before she decides to "like a post."

When McLaughlin told the group (during a Zoom meeting) that she was sorry for offending them, she was told that her apology was not accepted because it was not said with enough "feeling."

McLaughlin insists in the complaint that she supports equality and finds racism "despicable," but that she disagrees with the WOKE culture and critical race theory advocated by two of her coaches.

The coaches gave McLaughlin an ultimatum. She could either keep her scholarship, redshirt, and practice only with the coach (and not the team) during which time she would receive diversity and inclusion training; or she could keep her scholarship and just be a student; or she could transfer, although there were only two weeks left before the start of the fall semester. She states it was clear that transfer was the coach's preference.

Initially McLaughlin considered the redshirt option, but claims that due to continued harassment, which included not receiving any team gear (which all redshirts receive), she finally opted to transfer to the University of Mississippi. Other harassments included forcing McLaughlin to endure courses on diversity and identities, and the privileges of race, along with a required 10-hour "growth plan," which included pop-quizzes and tests.

The complaint alleges that the two coaches — who are married to each other — are very open about their political views, which included urging the team to kneel during the National Anthem, despite players expressing opposition to doing so. Also, Gray-Walton had posted on social media that "not all Trump supporters are racist, but all of them decided that racism isn't a deal breaker."

The lawsuit alleges that McLaughlin has "suffered economic loss, emotional distress, humiliation, embarrassment, injury to her reputation, and lost enjoyment of life.... These statements placed Plaintiff in a false light before the public." McLaughlin's career plans included playing professionally in Europe,



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coaching, and eventually being an athletic director. Clearly, being smeared as a racist could adversely affect those possibilities.

In short, the message O.U. sent to McLaughlin (and other student athletes) is that one must conform to leftist thinking, or else. Hopefully, as a result of this lawsuit, a message will be sent to the University of Oklahoma that one should not be forced to hold to certain political or social views to attend and play a sport at O.U.

The case will be heard before Federal Judge Joe Heaton in Oklahoma City.

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