



## UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ATHLETICS

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To: Nicole Noren, Tom Farrey  
ESPN Outside the Lines  
From: Chad Moller, Missouri Athletics  
Date: December 4, 2013  
Re: Follow up

Nicole, I know that it has been a couple of months since your visit to Mizzou, and now that some time has passed, I wanted to reach out to share some thoughts related to your time here – specifically as it relates to the interviews your team conducted with Swimming Coach Greg Rhodenbaugh and Executive Associate Athletic Director Sarah Reesman about our former student-athlete, Sasha Menu Courey.

Certainly, we knew you might have some challenging questions you needed us to address, but after witnessing the tone of the visits, and the nature of the countless subsequent follow-up questions, it gave me concern about the underlying angle of the piece.

Much of the questioning seemed based on a presumption that Mizzou bears fault in Sasha's tragic situation, and I'm concerned about the balance of the piece. The opportunity to provide explanation, clarification and additional information relative to this very complicated situation (due to both the complexity of NCAA rules and the nature of mental illness) is certainly appreciated. I firmly believe that Mizzou has made extraordinary efforts to be transparent throughout this lengthy process of requests to address your inquiries and I hope that you will carefully review and consider our various replies.

As you are aware, Sasha came to Mizzou after being recruited here by our previous coaching staff. Her lead recruiter was assistant coach Pat Rowan, and Pat has told us that neither he nor anyone on the staff knew anything about Sasha's previous suicidal actions in high school. We do not have access to medical records in the recruiting process, and must trust the parents and student-athlete to share everything they feel is pertinent. Our understanding is that this information was not shared in this case.

To our knowledge, our staff did not become aware of Sasha's previous suicide attempt until after Coach Rhodenbaugh came on board. I believe he was able to share with you that he learned of this when Mrs. Lynn Courey phoned Greg worried that she couldn't reach Sasha for a period of time. This was in the summer of 2010, just a few months after Greg became our coach. Thankfully, Sasha was found soon, and upon learning of this previous history, our coaching staff encouraged her to seek counseling, which she did, and which was provided by the MU Student Health Center on campus. By all accounts, Sasha did very well with the counseling initially, as it appeared to help her balance things.

At the beginning of the second semester of the 2010-11 season, Sasha developed a back injury which hampered her ability to train. At some point, Sasha hinted to Greg that she was not keeping her

counseling appointments, which was concerning to hear. This prompted Greg to tell Sasha that she needed to focus on getting herself better, both physically and mentally/emotionally, and instructed her to take some time off from training. The idea was that using swimming as an incentive would help direct Sasha to be consistent with counseling, physical rehab, and classwork. Greg was in communication with Sasha's parents about this plan of action. It is important to note that Sasha was never removed from the team, and any assertion of that is incorrect. If she had been removed from the team, she would have been stricken from the website roster, and kept from future team activities, and her scholarship would have been cancelled. Sasha was told she could come back to the pool when she was ready. Along with that she was told that she needed to use all the resources at the Mizzou Athletics Training Complex, which included the training room, the academic support center for athletes, the dining hall, and the strength and conditioning center to work her way back. To our knowledge, Sasha never gave anyone here an indication she felt as though she couldn't eventually return to competition.

Sasha eventually sought treatment at the MU Psychiatric Center, where it has been reported she was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. On an aside, I've seen a newspaper article or two where either Mrs. Courey or Mr. Menu state that they wish this diagnosis had been given for Sasha after her suicide attempt during her high school years. Upon leaving the MU Psychiatric Center, in March of 2011, Sasha attempted to take her life at a local motel, while her parents were in Columbia watching over their daughter's progress, as you know. Thankfully, this attempt was unsuccessful, but due to injuries from this attempt, she was admitted to MU's hospital.

At this time, with only a little over a month left in the academic semester, a decision had to be made related to Sasha's academic future. Knowing that she would likely be in treatment facilities for the remainder of the semester and unable to finish her coursework (let alone have the right mindset to do so at her level of expectation), our academic team, led by advisor Meghan Anderson, consulted with Sasha's family in regards to her academic options. The initial decision was to see how Sasha would progress at the Kansas City facility, where her family and medical professionals had decided to transfer her for further care. Once the decision was made to seek treatment in Boston, following the stay in Kansas City, Meghan was consulted again, and Sasha and her family made the final decision to withdraw her from her courses.

This decision was made with Sasha's best interest in mind to protect her academic future and allow her to return to Mizzou when ready. Had this step not been taken, under the circumstances she was at serious risk of failing academically and being unable to return at a later time. At the very least, it would have been very difficult for Sasha to return had this step not been taken, and her athletic eligibility might have been in serious jeopardy. More detailed information from this time was provided in e-mail responses to your inquiries over the past few weeks.

Both Greg and Sarah stayed engaged with Mrs. Courey and Mr. Menu for quite some time after Sasha was away from school, and the hope by all was that Sasha would get well and eventually make her way back to Mizzou and rejoin the team. Her athletics scholarship was kept in place and she had been enrolled in courses for the upcoming fall term.

Soon after leaving the MU hospital, Sasha went to a care facility in the Kansas City area, and later to the facility in the Boston area, where she would later ultimately take her life on June 17<sup>th</sup>. The Mizzou Athletics community was naturally heartbroken to learn of this, and both Athletics and the swimming staff and team stayed in contact with Sasha's parents, and helped make arrangements for a couple of different campus memorial services, as well as other things that NCAA rules permit us to do in this set of circumstances. The bottom line is, every communication between Coach Rhodenbaugh and Sarah Reesman with Sasha's parents was very positive and supportive both ways, so to hear the accusatory nature of many of Tom's questions was indeed surprising.

Another important thing to note is related to a sexual incident during Sasha's freshman year. No one on the coaching staff (the previous staff was here in February of 2010), and no one in our administration nor any staff members, were to the best of our knowledge, ever told about this event while Sasha was alive. Had Sasha told any of our staff that she felt she had been assaulted, we expect that our staff would have reported it immediately to the proper authorities. Following the massive Sunshine request from Sasha's parents, the University's custodian of records reviewed documents from Sasha's draft e-mail folder, and saw a reference to this in an online chat transcript that Sasha apparently had kept. The chat transcript was not very clear about the situation and didn't identify anyone else involved, nor did it give any indication that Sasha had reported the situation to anyone. As you know, the custodian of records contacted the MU Office of Student Conduct, who reached out to Mrs. Courey and Mr. Menu to see if they had information and wanted the University to conduct an investigation. Student Conduct received no response to my understanding, but you would have to ask Sasha's parents about that certainly.

Tom's assertion during the interview session that Mizzou Athletics should have known that there was an alleged assault was based on his belief that it was "well known" within the student-athlete community here at Mizzou. I can't confirm or dispute the validity of Tom's assertion, but either way, we are not aware of that supposed knowledge ever making its way to anyone in a position of authority. Again, to be clear, we have no evidence to suggest that Mizzou Athletics personnel had any knowledge of this allegation. Further, any suggestion of that sort seems inconsistent with the chat transcript that ultimately was found in Sasha's draft e-mail folder. Nothing in the chat transcript indicated that Sasha had discussed the incident with anyone, even her therapist.

After the chat transcript came to our attention, communication was made with both former coach Pat Rowan and former academic advisor Meghan Anderson – both of whom were very close to Sasha as I understand it. Neither of them had any knowledge of this event. Meghan spoke to Sasha on the phone from the Boston facility, and during that conversation, Sasha said that Mizzou was the best place for her to be and that she looked forward to getting back here soon.

I do apologize for such a lengthy letter, so I will try to wrap up my thoughts now. The bottom line is that following your visit, the angle of this story seems to be that the University bears fault for Sasha's tragedy. The fact is that Sasha had mental health problems before she came to Mizzou, and after we became aware of those concerns we did everything we could to support her and guide her to people and resources to help her. Her parents seem to have made great efforts to get help for Sasha as well,

including getting her to an elite treatment facility in Boston. Ultimately, none of it could prevent such a tragic end to a young woman's life which had so much potential, and it certainly is a stark realization of just how difficult of an issue that mental illness can be. A recent article in *People Magazine* about Rick Warren is very topical to this issue, and how nobody, not even elite-level athletes, are immune to mental health issues. I was very impressed with how *People* handled the topic and was respectful to the Warren family dealing with the tragic loss of their son.

With everything, our hearts and our prayers continue to go out to Lynn and Mike for their loss of Sasha. We believe that they did everything they could to try and help their daughter, as we did here at Mizzou.

We are hopeful that the overall focus of your piece is to help raise awareness about the issue and challenges of mental illness, and if there are things we can do from our position of leadership at Mizzou to assist, please consider us as willing to do so.

Best wishes,

*Chad Moller*

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