**I’VE LEFT, DO I STILL COME FORWARD?**

**Introduction**

Jen was heavily recruited by Coach Fran of Public University for the 2010-2011 season. She had a stellar high school career in basketball. She was a two-time captain and was an “all-metro” honoree. She was looking forward to playing in college, and with a successful coach who had been to two NCAA tournaments and had a record over .500. After several years, she left Public University to play for another school. However, she was stunned when she heard that the Coach had been terminated. The University was being silent about the reason for her termination, and Jen knew current players could not discuss the issue with the media. She wondered if she should come forward and tell the media what she had gone through as one of Coach Fran’s players. Would she be labeled a trouble maker or even worse?

**Jen’s Experience**

Jen had grown up in a mixed-faith home. Her mother was a Christian, and her father was a Muslim. Jen practiced Islam. Jen didn’t think her religion would be a problem as initially Coach Fran seemed welcoming and the university was a public institution which was not affiliated with any church or religion. However, once Jen arrived, things changed. There were comments she heard from other players about the Coach and how she managed the team. She told players not to fraternize with male students, and to sit in their rooms and study. The coach was also known to have strong opinions about religious practice, virginity, and weight.

Jen sat out most of her freshman year because of an injury. She became a medical redshirt the rest of the year to extend her eligibility. When she returned the following season, the coach made comments on Jen’s weight as well as making comments on religious beliefs. Earlier, Jen had been told by one of her teammates that you had to “pray to play.” Coach Fran was very active in a local Christian Church and religion was a big part of her life. Her twitter feeds also mentioned Biblical verses on a regular basis. Even though Jen had had the impression that practicing Islam was not a problem when she committed to PU, she began to believe that Coach Fran was trying to convert her. Coach Fran was the advisor to the student organization, Fellowship of Christian Athletes. She urged her players to join. She wanted the team to attend church services at Christian churches when they traveled, and she showed Christian videos on bus trips. If Jen declined to attend Christian church services, Coach Fran would not speak to her for a period of time even though the Coach had said attendance was optional. Pastors from Christian churches were often brought in as “coaches of honor.”

During the Fall of her second year, Coach Fran took Jen aside and told her that the team was going to watch a video of the Coach’s church testimony. The Coach indicated that it would be “really, really, really good” for Jen to watch it. The pressure was intense and Jen agreed to attend in order to be with her team. However, she felt very uncomfortable. If that weren’t bad enough, Jen heard the coach say to a restaurant manager while on a road trip, “…We’re a Christian basketball team.”

If the religious intimidation wasn’t enough, Coach Fran then became obsessed with Jen’s weight. The obsession started during the medical leave, but didn’t stop the following year when Jen was very physically active. The coach challenged her to a weight-losing contest prior to the season. Coach Fran had teammates talk to Jen about her eating habits. The coach would have the team captains tell Jen she was eating too much at meals or drinking too much 2% milk. Some concerned teammates secretly got Jen snacks on road trips and didn’t think Jen was overweight. The focus on weight added more stress to Jen’s situation. She started weighing herself four or five times a day and started exercising in the middle of the night. This pressure from the coach was at odds with basketball programs where trainers rather than the Coach dealt with weight issues.

As the religious and weight comments continued, Jen became more and more insecure. She wanted the situation to change, but she was worried about complaining. Coach Fran was married to the University President. Public institutions weren’t supposed to push a particular religious view, but how could the President not know what the coach was doing? Jen remembered that the President was at a mandatory team party where Bible verses were read.

Jenna discussed the coach’s behavior with other players, her family and assistant coaches. Nothing changed. Finally she contacted the Athletic Director. He just apologized to her and said he would help her transfer to another state institution. She had to sit out a season because of the transfer, but found the new school “like heaven.” She was one of 3 women who left the Public University team that season.

**The Coach is Terminated**

The following year, after Jen’s departure, things seemed as usual with Women’s Basketball at PU. Coach Fran had a team that ranked high on Academic Progress, the school was moving to a new league and she had been recognized with a prestigious national award given for her advocacy work for children suffering sexual abuse.

Then, suddenly, on June 12, the Coach was fired. Although the termination had occurred in the morning, there was no formal announcement to the university community until hours later. Even before the announcement about the Coach, the school was stunned to hear that the President was retiring within months. Because the firing was a “personnel matter”, no explanation was given for the termination. Rumors spread on campus, and local media started filing Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to find out more about the situation.

Although the initial announcements about Coach Fran’s departure didn’t offer much information, a statement issued later in June indicated that that the coach was fired with cause. The statement in part read: “indications of conduct and behavior of the women’s basketball head coach, if true could be malfeasance and materially adversely affect the orderly or efficient operation of the women’s basketball program….” While this was additional information, no details were provided and rumors continued in the media and across campus.

**Jen’s Dilemma**

Meanwhile, Jen was still trying to work through psychological issues related to her experiences at Public U. She wondered if she should come forward and explain what her experience had been. With the lack of information, it was possible that Coach Fran could be hired someplace else. As a former player, did she have an ethical obligation to come forward and explain how players were treated? If she did come forward, would it put stress on her and adversely impact her future and her family? She needed to decide.

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