

University of Idaho Women's Volleyball 2023 Formal Complaint Regarding Athlete Abuse

I am a student-athlete reporting abuse suffered by myself and my teammates on the women's volleyball team, abuse inflicted by Head Coach, Christopher Gonzales. The abuse was suffered by at least 13 players from the start of this current athletic season 2023 and ongoing, and during last year's season 2022 under head coach Gonzales. The student-athletes experienced physical, emotional, verbal, and mental abuse. Through many abusive behaviors, Coach Gonzales and his staff perpetuate a culture of harassment, bullying, and belittling. Many of the girls are now experiencing a marked decrease in mental and physical health. The team has witnessed incidents of cheating on the sidelines, in which a coach not present at the match was directing play through a messaging app, calling timeouts and telling the coaches who to sub in and when as well as coaches speeding more than 30 mph over the speed limit while driving players. When we reported these incidents, we were disregarded by authorities in place to assist us and keep us safe. The abuse, harassment, and bullying has gotten to the point where there is a decline in classroom performance, as well as a visible lack of success on the court. As players we are experiencing a wide range of harassment, from petty bullying after a loss, to being blamed for 50 years of past program failures. Our coaches lie to each other and the players, with no communication throughout the program. The coaches disregard concerns and advice from medical professionals, continuing to expose us to physical activities and exercises that hinder recovery and actively increase the chance of injury. The coaches take advantage of the fear players have to get around medical options and have medically un-cleared players participate in the matches, despite debilitating injuries. After a poor match result, coaches took a week off, informing us to run our own practice, unsupervised. To create our own game plan since they feel disrespected by our poor performance, clear statements from coaches on them giving up on us. There has been significant retaliatory action when complaints were brought up in the past, with "favorite" players suddenly harassed and belittled over the smallest actions that other players are praised for.

We have experienced various examples of abuse, including the following:

Verbal/Emotional Abuse- Includes negative comments from Head Coach Gonzales about body, ability, personal characteristics intended to demean, hurt and ridicule or embarrass. Video sessions including segments showing players making mistakes focused on isolating players and alienating them as Coach Gonzalez ridiculed them. Imposes inappropriate expectations that are beyond the developmental capability of a young athletes-expecting players to make no mistakes in practices and games. Coach Gonzalez comments about players' body weight, body shape, and incorrectly correlates physical traits of individual players to team success on court.

Physical Abuse- in the form of retaliatory actions, such as extreme and excessive physical activity meant to exhaust or otherwise harm athletes physically

Intimidation- embarrasses and bullies' players, punitive towards their character and emotions. Tries to persuade players into giving him answers/ what he wants.

Harassment- Threatens one or more players with some form of retaliatory activity (i.e., a harsh or punitive practice). Sending unwanted or inappropriate text messages to individual players. Creates unhealthy environment and unwanted culture, tarnishes teams' image within the community/University.

1.). Physical Abuse

- In the beginning of the season, we had four straight weeks where we were away traveling, 3 matches a week. Increased number of injuries occurred on the team, 14 players on the injury report at one time.
- During pre-season there are supposed to be limitations and guidelines on length of time for practices and competitions, to ensure over-training does not lead to injury. There were no limitations on how long practices were for us, however, with many injuries suffered and noted in injury reports, we did not get shorter practices or any days off for recovery or required physical therapy.
- After the fourth straight week, he decided to give us a shorter practice, but it was only 15 minutes shorter.
- During pre-season and the first week of season, 4 players got injured to the point where they could not practice or play in games because of how serious the injuries were. Injuries consisted of back, knee, wrist, shoulder, and ankle.
- During a defensive practice, players who were injured were forced to dive for a ball by assistants and Coach Gonzalez and continued to be injured. Some had knee injuries and popped several bursae during this practice after being forced to go for the ball and hitting the ground on their knees. Said players were then yelled at and punished in front of the entire team.
- Laid 2 volleyballs on the ground under the net, told players to attack a set but do not land on the balls. Players were uncomfortable doing the task and were told the only successful way to complete the drill would be to land on the correct side of the balls. In volleyball, it is a common safety rule not to let any balls roll or be on the court during play since stepping on a ball can cause serious injury. In fact, one of the first things a volleyball player learns is to ensure the field of play is clear of any objects like balls which can cause serious injury if you step on one.

- Put a player in a game, after medical professionals told coaches she could not play. Ignored medical advice and put player at greater risk of back injury.
- Injured players who are hurt at practice are put at more risk with their injuries when he puts them to dive on the ground for a ball and forces them to continue playing and performing exacerbatory movements on injuries.
- When at the gym from 9-3p.m we aren't given food and told to find food ourselves. Seems to happen only on home game days and when we lose.
- Without their consent, Gonzales grabs girls around the waist/hips to lift them in the air for a blocking drill, again without their consent. Girls feel violated/ uncomfortable even when he says, "don't take this out of context." Combined with his verbally abusive language during training, it is inappropriate to make players feel uncomfortable through touch.
- Tracks sleep with OURA ring, punishes players he sees don't get enough sleep. This requires each athlete to allow the OURA ring to monitor their activity in a manner that violates the privacy of the athlete and may reveal personal medical or physical data without their consent.

2.). Body Shaming

- "She is a bottom heavy."
- "You have my opinion of an ideal volleyball players body type, long hamstrings, narrow hips, broad shoulders."
- "They're built like linebackers with too much mass which doesn't help them jump high."
- Calls players "overweight"
- Falsely correlates body weight with skillset and compares players abilities based off of body weight and build.
- "You'll play defense differently because of your strong legs and strong butt" *laughs
- "I wanted your bodies to be a certain way and I wasn't seeing any change, so I needed to make a change."
- "It took a lot more to get you up there than I thought it would."

2.). Intimidation and Discrimination

- "Plan on being miserable until November."
- "If she is embarrassed by this video that is her problem not a me problem."
- "I brought you here because I saw something, I can't even coach you. I don't deserve that" - Statement said to a player after a loss, telling her that recruiting her was a mistake and challenged her and other players to quit

- “I’ve coached much, much, much, much better players than you, and they wouldn’t even consider doing something like that.”
- “The only words out of your mouth should be yes sir.”
- “You lied to me.”
- “You have no responsibility, no discipline, no self-accountability, no self-awareness, but an incredible willingness to let people just beat the crap out of you.” - has been said repeatedly after a loss, where coach tries to blame players commitment for losses, likes to imply that players are ambivalent towards game results and that he is the only one who cares.
- “You are the biggest culprit.” -Told to a player at a halftime meeting during a match, blaming her for the wrong happenings on the court, and why the team wasn’t finding success.
- “The school is paying me.” -Said after a game, telling the team that our win/loss record doesn’t matter to him because he gets paid anyways, we are the ones being reflected poorly by the record.
- When the team entered the locker room after returning from a travel trip, there were the opposing team’s football athletic trainers’ bags in our locker room. We all entered and thought nothing of it because the game was still going on. That night we got an email saying players felt “violated” that there was other equipment in our space, even though no one on the team had verbally complained about the situation. Continued to call individual players and ask how the team felt and if players felt violated. Tried to use his position as coach to pressure players into confirming the incorrect statement about players feelings. Bullied individual players into speaking on behalf of the team, and clearly wanting them to confirm his own feelings and thoughts.
- “If she knew what it took to get her into this situation, this school, this country.”
- Mentioned players’ financial situations in front of the whole team and/ or other players. Uses their situations against them, to make them feel bad.
- Asks players about personal financial situations
- Calls girls un-coachable
- Tries to get players to go behind each other’s backs to him about personal situations so that he can leverage player relationships and personal life over each other
- Told American players that when international players get here, they will travel over Americans because they “gave up so much to be here”.
- Shows clear favoritism for the international students. “I don’t have to worry about their level of commitment and discipline”.
- Said “If you do not know the game plan you will not be traveling”, international student didn’t know game plan and still traveled. But the week before American didn’t know the game plan and didn’t travel.
- Tells players everything gets back to him, he knows everything, he hears everything. To intimidate players into not speaking up about safety concerns.

- Asked us why the food that we get and new shoes we have received isn't reciprocating into our wins. Compared us to professional teams, how they get paid and are expected to play at a certain level, why are we not playing at a certain standard if we are receiving these things?
- Constantly points out the negative with our play and program, never says anything positive about players or team.
- Threatens to coach us in abusive ways but says he "cannot because he would be fired".
- Tells players we are not Nebraska and Texas level because the difference is daily discipline and accountability.
- Subs players out of games without explanation, then continues to yell and intimidate them in front of the team.
- Threatens players who are not on scholarship that they will not travel/ play in practice.
- Called a player by a different name in a different language, player said they didn't like it, and it continued all season. Player was called "Mollie" which he said meant "little girl" in another language.
- Called a player "Gizmo" throughout the season in reference to the Gremlins movie because he believed the player looked like a character from the movie.

3.). Examples of retaliation and ridicule, emotional abuse.

- Using derogatory or discriminatory language, belittling an individual
- Constantly belittles certain players and embarrasses them in front of the team.
- Removed a player from the travel roster because they chose to eat a calzone on a travel trip, told trainer the player made poor eating decisions, and that is why she was no longer traveling
- Wears team issue gear inside out to hide the University of Idaho logo on travel trips
- Using words like "you embarrass me because I recruited you, you make me look bad"
- Constantly verbalizes his distrust and disrespect for players and how much he feels we disrespect the coaching staff when. Does not trust players to still work hard in a practice if they get told they will not be traveling the next weekend. Uses phrases like "it is so disrespectful to my time and effort".
- Shows videos of individual players doing things wrong, in front of the whole team, to embarrass and harass that player.
- Ridicules our personalities and forms of conversations. When an athlete is trying to stand up for herself.
- Creates a culture of fear, humiliation, embarrassment, and intimidation. Every player fears him and his verbal abuse.

- Players have had panic attacks after meetings with him, many players developing anxiety and depression on the court, off the court, and in the classroom.
- Verbal threats, telling players if he did certain actions he would get fired instantly.
- Cusses at and in front of players.
- Puts expectations on players to perform a certain way, but does not coach us on how to do so
- Only will receive coaching help if we search for it, even when we do it is very limited
- Both assistant coaches have little coaching experience and do not give us beneficial information
- Won't coach us in the game or tell us what to fix but after the games will tell us everything we were doing wrong
- Makes narcissistic comments, constantly saying "I" and making players feel selfish for his problems.
- Makes a player on the team do extra reps after practice for her 'mistakes' during practice, others will make the same mistakes but only picks on her, and only calls her out, when others are doing the same thing.
- Only picks on specific players and does not hold everyone to the same standard.
- Makes us feel bad for the things they have given us, like team-issued gear.
- Blames players for 50 years of program failures, saying we are adding to the failures and part of the problem.
- Pins players against coaches, assistant coaches fear Coach Chris, so they lie to players about incidents we have proof of to have an upper hand against the head coach.
- Pins players against each other, talks to individuals/ couple players about other players in negative and demeaning ways.

4.) Jeopardizing the safety of student-athletes

- Many parents were concerned for the players' safety. We brought this issue to the athletic director, and it got back to our coaches. Our coach said that whoever said that information about our assistant coach "is wrong."
 - No disciplinary action was taken in response to the coach's driving, since the coach told the athletic director that we were liars.
- During the season, players reported a safety concern about coach driving over the speed limit, were dismissed, and told we were liars even though we have proof.
- While driving the team vehicle, our assistant coach would drive erratically, apply the brakes extremely hard and randomly swerve left and right when nothing was in the road.
- She exceeded the speed limit and reached over 100 miles per hour at one point, we have photo proof that she went at least 95 miles per hour.

- The head coach appeared to be falling asleep at the wheel because his head would go down for 1-2 seconds, but we figured out he had neck problems, and would take his eyes off the road. When driving with him it would not make us feel safe.

MENTAL/EMOTIONAL IMPACT THE ABUSE HAS HAD ON THE PLAYERS

- Players are fearful of speaking up during film sessions/meetings to avoid additional verbal abuse and ridicule.
- Certain have become anti-social and distrust other players based on false accusation coaches have made to her.
- Players have developed anxiety and depression, as well as low self-esteem and low self-confidence due to several forms of abuse/harassment.
- Players on the bench are not allowed to help teammates or give them advice without our coaches' permission.
- Team morale on travel trips is low, due to fear of doing something wrong/getting in trouble by coaches.

ADDITIONAL FORMS OF ABUSE FROM 2022 SEASON

- Additional examples of abuse occurred during the 2022 season. Athletes who reported these abuses to the AD are no longer at the University. The reports include similar examples of body shaming, withholding food from players (i.e., team meals during travel trips), physically exhausting and harmful practices, forcing players to play with injury or without being medically cleared.
- Some athletes who witnessed the abuse in 2022 are among the current team members experiencing abuse in 2023.

Addendum Following Preliminary Moscow OCRI meeting and Meeting with Terry, Chris Walsh, and the Dean of Students

There was a meeting between AD Gawlik, The Dean of Students, Chris Walsh and members of the Volleyball team on October 30th at 9:15 am. In this meeting, from all athletes present, there was a feeling of disregard of our situation by AD Gawlik, as well as Chris Walsh. Chris Walsh has been kept informed of the abuse and harassment of Vandal Volleyball players for this current season, as well as being knowledgeable about the 2022 season. However still did nothing, despite being head athletic trainer last year, and having been promoted to a job with emphasis on student athlete care.

Coach Gonzalez, Chris Walsh, and Cait Brown met with Emma and told her that she was “a red flag for suicide.” Coach Gonzales was made aware of prior mental health problems Emma experienced, and Cait Brown was kept loosely apprised of current psychological medications and Emma’s overall status. However the intervention was aggressive and concerning from Emma’s view point, especially considering that in the case of someone who was actually having mental health struggles, an intermission like that would discourage any further communication and seeking of help from the victim.

AD Gawlik was shown documents last season containing statements of Gonzalez's past players but refused to read. Volleyball athletes who were experiencing the same abuse last year went to Terry with documents highlighting their situation, as well as support documents from some of Coach Gonzales's past players. Terry did not read the documents, and split up the athletes when they tried to meet with her, interrogating them and picking apart any perceived inconsistency in their verbal recounting of the abuse, with Terry then taking the inconsistencies to mean that any and all abuse experienced was invalid.

AD Gawlik seemed disturbed that Emma was joining the meeting on October 30th at 9:15 A.M, Despite inclusion in the email chain requesting a meeting with Terry, Emma's presence was a surprise and based on Terry's initial reaction, an unpleasant one. She made a comment about not enough chairs, but did let Emma remain for the duration of the meeting.

Unexpectedly had DOS (Dean of Students, Blaine Eckles) in the meeting- The DOS, University President, and University Provost were sent an email on Sunday evening (October 29th), letting them know about the abuse happening in the athletics program. The next morning (Monday, October 30th) the Dean of Students invited himself to the meeting and was present. Eckles, the Dean of Students, was the only staff member present in the meeting that was visibly concerned and intrigued about understanding the severity of the situation and actively looking to help to provide protection and solutions as well as a path forward for us. The DOS offered to meet directly with the team and show his support and respect for them, and also offered a case manager to supervise any interactions with Gonzalez.

Tuesday, October 31st, there was an incident at practice involving a girl on the team, where a ball was going to hit her face, so she basically made a protective movement. Later on Coach Gonzales was talking to the player and said I know you "have a beautiful face" and want to keep it that way...

Tuesday, October 31st, Coach Gonzales was running a drill on a court and when a player did something successfully, he said "i love you!! Then paused before realizing the inappropriateness and added on "like a niece"

Cait Brown (Athletic Trainer) has witnessed and stood by the team for the past 2 years as they have continued to experience several forms of abuse and retaliation. She can attest that all forms have been in fact inflicted, and has suffered some of her own mental issues with Coach Gonzalez as well. Cait now has to record any meetings she has with coaches, with fear that they may take action against her, and/or say something harmful about a girl on the team.

11/5/2023

The Captains had a meeting with two assistant coaches. Asked if we could adjust a drill because we weren't getting enough reps. Also asked if we could adjust what we go over in film sessions because many girls are confused and it is affecting our play on the court. Both coaches got defensive and said that it was our fault that we are not getting enough reps because of how many serves we miss, and that we are undisciplined and unfocused. Said that the "team culture" is not very strong because we are not disciplined. Said that they work so hard and it is frustrating as coaches because of all that they do. Said

that it is not possible to adjust film because we need to do a better job at communicating, told them we do communicate that is not the problem. Did a drill the day before and did internationals vs. Americans for fun, everyone thought it was fun, no one took any offense to it at all. In our meeting coaches said that, that will never ever happen again. Told us that during other drills they have noticed we separate returners vs. internationals and the others. We told them that we randomly go to each side of the court, we do not purposely separate. Every time when we do separate courts, it is always mixed and no one is ever separated. After that they told us the internationals girls feel isolated and don't feel like they are comfortable. Said how they are being separated from the team. Everyone on the team is inclusive. No one on the team leaves anyone out, we are all friends.

Player was smiling/laughing before a play during serve receive, did not even touch the ball yet. Assistant coach asked "what are you doing? Why are you laughing, you're unfocused." Player was just trying to be happy, her laughing was not disrespectful towards anyone or anything and it was not affecting her play.

During a film session assistant coach said something in a funny tone about our defense, so the whole team laughed for a brief half of a second, and another assistant coach said "why are you laughing, you shouldn't be, that is not funny, it is sad."

During a meeting with both assistant coaches they pointed out how we were dancing on the sideline during the game and how that is not okay when we are losing. We have been taught to have energy on the bench and sideline to help the team's energy. Players were not dancing at an inappropriate time in the game, they were dancing during a challenge. Players have also been previously told that when they are quiet "where did your energy go", so smiling and dancing is not allowed but neither is no sound at all. Players feel like they will get punished for dancing or laughing because of the environment the coaches have created. Players feel like robots and are told to act as so.

Examples of Retaliation

Beginning of the season he treated both captains with respect, spoke to them equally and fairly. During team meetings coaches always would call on both captain's to speak. Both captains went to Chris Walsh for driving safety concerns, and coaches tried to find out who went and spoke to Chris Walsh. A few days later we had a team meeting. Coach Gonzalez only called on one captain and did not even make eye contact with the other. After practice we had the captain's speak to the team, but he did not call on the other captain to speak for the next day or two. There was a major behavioral change with the way he speaks and coaches one of the captains from the start of the season till current.

9/29//23

Had a team meeting and watched film from our Weber State match. Watched an entire set of the game, coaches only pointed out negatives, nothing positive was said. After the coaches were done talking, a captain wanted to point out some positive things that we did as a team as a whole, and spoke aloud trying to give the team a more positive outlook on our loss. Player was a consistent starter and leads the team in kills. The next day against Idaho State she didn't start the match, and coaches tried finding someone else to play her position.

Another player met with Coach about concerns about his language toward her. Explained how she felt he was getting too personal. Coach Gonzalez said that share was unprofessional, undisciplined, unfocused, “not what he thought he was going to get”, not a hard worker, and was exactly the kind of player that “I let go” last year. She was told that she has too much fun on the sidelines and that he wants all bench players to stand in a line, smiling is acceptable, but laughing and dancing is not. Player was a consistent starter and is second in leading the team in kills. Our next two games against Portland State and Sacramento State she did not start, and did not play much.

11/16

It was the last practice of the year, and players decided to dress up in non-movement restrictive outfits for a last practice. Assistant coach (Romana) saw and was laughing and went back to her office, then called the freshman representative to a meeting and texted players that everyone would be meeting in the locker room now, so players got ready for film and set up in the locker room. The representative met with coaches and returned to the locker room and players were told to change with no explanation. All players changed, went to practice and set everything up according to the times coaches had sent. Film was scheduled to start at 3:30 and by 3:26 practice courts were set up and the entirety of the team was seated, waiting for coaches to start the film session. Immediately the assistant coach (Maria) asks why we were late. One of the players responded that there was a misunderstanding based on the coaches message about meeting in the locker room, rather than a separate building, and proceeded to apologize and say that the tardiness wouldn't happen again. The coaches said players were not being accountable for their own actions. This player is not traveling this weekend. The two assistant coaches then called up the two captains that were present and embarrassed them on film questions that had not yet been reviewed, when an incorrect answer was provided the coaches responded with “incorrect” or “wrong” in an incredibly negative tone of voice. Assistant coaches then proceeded to say that it was apparent that no one has watched film on their own time (this has never been commonplace, and if any independent study is required, the team is sent a message about it) and that maybe if we cared more about volleyball than costumes the team could dress up and would win. Assistant coach (Maria) called the players “immature children” to the athletic trainer because of their actions.

11/17

We were scheduled to travel to Eastern Washington for a match that day at 1:30 p.m. Around 12:33 p.m a captain asked in the team group chat if we would be provided lunch seeing as though there would be a 8 hour gap between when we traveled, played, and then got food again. Players were told to get food at that time and to eat granola bars from snack bags that were given. 2 players responded with a pig emoji to the captain's text asking about lunch, but were abruptly kicked out of the group chat by assistant coach (Maria). Specific players had been responding with random emojis to texts all year so it was not out of the ordinary. The two players were not traveling and received no text as to why they were kicked out. Head Coach Gonzalez traveled to Eastern Washington in his personal vehicle, as he did previously in the season to Gonzaga and last year as well. Athletic Trainer was forced to drive a University issued 12 passenger van that was run down, and had a tire pressure gauge warning symbol on the entire drive. Meanwhile, the two assistant coaches got to drive a 2024 Jeep Grand Wagoneer as a rental vehicle to the

gym. Previously in the year the same van was issued for the athletic trainer to drive players, and there were problems with the vehicle then as well.

One of the players removed from the group chat was the person who drafted the text that the captain sent, writing the message for the captain, and then informing said captain that she was going to react to the message with a pig emoji, there is a history of camaraderie and friendship between the two players, and the player removed from the g

A captain, who plays every game and leads the team in kills, was issued to sit out for the team's last match after previously playing well in practice all week and starting the previous weekend. Was given no explanation and retaliated against for something she did, but was not told as to why. Head coach texted two other players in her position earlier in the day informing them that they will be starting and to watch certain film for the upcoming game that day. Captain was not texted she would be playing, or as to why she would not be playing.

Recently another player was made to get her hand x-rayed after playing multiple practices on a significantly bruised and swollen hand, an athletic trainer thought it was broken, but the player had not brought attention to her hand to the coaches out of fear and continued to play and damage it further.