

CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM

To: Christina Roybal, Vice President and Director of Athletics
Camryn Volz, Head Coach, Women's Basketball

From: Lori Southwood, Chief Human Resources Officer

Date: March 30, 2024

RE: Women's Basketball Investigation

This memorandum discusses the investigation that I performed regarding allegations involving Camryn Volz, head coach of the women's basketball team. I was assisted by Keisha McCraney, an investigator in the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Initial Reports and Interview Process

On March 5, 2024, the University received an anonymous report alleging "racial remarks," "homophobia," and "constant degradation of mental health" by Camryn Volz, head coach of the women's basketball team. A follow-up anonymous report was submitted on March 12, 2024, alleging that Volz "has created an environment where fear and manipulation are used to get us to stay here and stay compliant." The first report indicated that the entire team (all players) wished to speak out about Volz and her behavior.

In response, on March 13, 2024, University officials met collectively with six players on the 2023-2024 team to discuss the allegations. A seventh player was present outside the room during the discussion but said she was too uncomfortable to participate. The University officials who participated were Christina Roybal (Athletics), Sarah Pruess (Athletics), Darryl Peal (Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion), and Keisha McCraney (Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion).

During this meeting, the six players alleged that Volz had made racist and homophobic remarks during team activities, ignored or belittled players' mental health and created an environment of fear and intimidation within the team. They also alleged inappropriate behavior by Volz related to alcohol consumption in connection with team activities. Details regarding those allegations are discussed below.

Based on these allegations, an employment investigation was initiated by Human Resources. Between March 15 and March 22, 2024, Keisha McCraney and I conducted separate interviews of the remaining seven players on the 2023-2024 team, who were not present during the March 13 meeting, including the one player who left mid-season. In addition, we interviewed the three assistant coaches for the team, the Director of Women's Basketball Operations, the Director of Sports Performance, and one team manager.

On March 29, 2024, Grant Garber (Legal Affairs) and I met with Volz and her attorney, Maria Ante, to discuss the allegations. In advance of that meeting, a brief summary of the allegations, based on the prior interviews, was provided to Volz and her attorney. Volz responded to the allegations, denied making racist or homophobic statements, denied ignoring or mistreating players based on mental health issues, and defended her coaching style and team culture.

In total, the University has interviewed twenty individuals in connection with this matter.

General Observations

All individuals I interviewed spoke with passion and genuine concern about the issues that have been raised. I was impressed by the players, each of whom voiced their own perceptions and opinions, even if those differed from those of other players, while still remaining supportive of their teammates.

Coach Volz also spoke directly and with candor about these issues, and she adamantly defended herself while expressing concern for the well-being of her players, the basketball program and the University.

In some cases, Volz agreed that she made the comments that other interviewees had alleged. However, although there was agreement that those comments were made, there were significant differences of opinion about the intent behind the comments and different perceptions as between Volz and those who heard the statements. Also, note that in other cases, Volz denied making the comments attributed to her.

Allegation 1 – Allegedly racist statements

The majority of players and staff alleged that Volz frequently commented on African-American players' hair. Specifically, she told someone they were looking "rough and tough like they were going to beat someone up because of their hairstyle." She also was heard referring to hair as "unbrushed" and "a horse's mane."

Multiple players recount when a player took their braids down and Volz kept asking the player, "where did your hair go?" and "are you getting your hair done before the next game?" These comments were made in front of all the players and coaches during practices. Those on the receiving end of the comments and those observing commented on Volz's lack of awareness and or care of how her comments made those in attendance feel. One player said that it made the coach sound uneducated. Others reported they were surprised by the lack of awareness or sensitivity from someone who had been coaching for many years.

Volz did not deny commenting on players' hair. However, she does deny that she commented only about African-American players. She stated, "I would comment on any player's hair." Volz said, for example, that she would use the first five minutes of practice to make conversation with players, trying to connect on a different level, and that commenting on changing hair styles was one way to do that. She stated that she was not treating the players

differently based on race. She explained that the reason she may have commented more frequently on African-American players' hair was because they changed their hair more frequently.

Volz did not deny that she commented on a player looking "rough and tough with her hair braided." Volz explained that she wore her hair the same way when she was a player. In fact, she said that she meant it as a positive comment meaning, "rough and tough, makes it look like you're ready to play, go to war. Didn't at all mean she was ready to beat someone up." Volz went on to say she meant the phrase "beat someone up" in terms of basketball, not fighting.

Volz also acknowledged that she referred to a player's hair looking like a horse's mane, but this was meant to be a compliment. Volz said she grew up in a rural area where describing someone's hair as a "horse's mane" would be used to describe "long, beautiful thick hair."

Note that one staff member reported they have never heard Volz comment on any player's hair.

Also, some of the African-American players mentioned the lack of communication from Volz regarding media day, stating that they have asked to be informed ahead of time instead of last minute for media day, because it is hard to schedule hair appointments at the last minute. They also noted that she would probably talk about their hair either way.

In response, Volz shared that she is not responsible for scheduling media day, which is the responsibility of sports information staff. Volz explained that the players would not necessarily know that. Volz also said that she works to respect the players' time. Everything is planned out well in advance to respect players' time. "We schedule things around when they're going to be at the gym because we don't want them going home and having to come back over and over."

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

She said that, during practice, players usually pick which group they are in. Occasionally players might be separated based on skill sets or based on the practice plans that they create together, but never based on race.

In addition, several individuals alleged that Volz made negative comments about the city of [REDACTED]. After the [REDACTED] game, it was reported that Volz talked loudly about the poor condition of the roads and the houses in [REDACTED] without considering those on the bus who live or may have family or other connection in [REDACTED]. It was reported that Volz mentioned to other players that a particular player was from [REDACTED] saying, "Sometimes I need to get on her because she's from [REDACTED]"

In response, Volz reported that the bus driver that day in [REDACTED] had initiated the conversation with the coaches sitting in the front of the bus, referring to the city of [REDACTED] as dangerous. They were talking about the green lights on gas stations indicating that here is live security footage. Volz also said that the conversation was among staff in the front of the bus, and it was not directed or intended to be heard by players, who typically sat further back.

[REDACTED] Volz denies that she ever said that she would need to get on a player because she's from [REDACTED].

Except for the comments and other information described above, no one has alleged or provided evidence suggesting differential treatment of players based on race.

Allegation 2 – Allegedly homophobic statements

Many of the players mentioned Volz outing a [REDACTED] player [REDACTED]. A few players voiced their concerns about homophobic statements being made in their presence.

[REDACTED] She said that when she and her staff are recruiting players, they talk with them about their families, friends and similar topics to get to know them and establish a positive relationship. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Volz does not remember ever making a statement about someone else's sexuality and denied outing anyone.

A player reported that recently at Cleveland State, Volz made fun of gender stereotypes. The student recalled everyone on the team receiving papers with the chad (small circles) still in them. Volz then said poking holes in the binder is a men's thing [REDACTED]

Volz responded that the players have binders with metal rings. Usually, they are hole-punched before they are given to the girls. This time, the papers did not have holes pre-punched, so some of the girls were pushing on the three rings to punch holes in the papers to get them in the binder. Volz described her reaction, in a joking manner, as, "I'm so OCD, I need those things officially hole punched." She said, "that's such a guy thing to do," meaning, men do not care if it is messy. Volz said it "was just a general statement, not directed at anyone."

Also, one person reported hearing the coach say, “the refs were terrible this game and especially that lesbian ref,” after they lost in Oakland.

Volz responded, “I have never made a comment to the team about the sexual orientation of refs, nor do I know refs personally. If they heard me saying something – I wouldn’t say that ‘lesbian ref.’ I do not remember saying those words.”

A staff member said that Volz seemed to have an “overstepping interest” in the sexuality of the players. [REDACTED]

Except for the comments and other information described above, no one has alleged or provided evidence suggesting differential treatment of players based on sexual orientation.

Allegation 3 – Alleged mistreatment of players regarding mental health issues

Multiple players expressed concerns about Volz’s treatment of certain players who had mental health-related issues, such as not allowing them playing time, ignoring them during games or practice and sharing their health-related information with the team. [REDACTED]

Volz denied mistreating anyone due to their struggles with mental health challenges. To the contrary, she said that “from day one,” she and her staff talk with the team about the mental health resources available to them and encourage them to seek help if needed. She denied viewing a player’s request for help in any negative way, denied telling a player that a mental health issue would keep them from playing, and she said that she would never tell anyone that they were “weak” for having a mental health issue or illness. Any use of the word “weak” by her would have been in the context of a basketball activity (eg, “don’t be mentally weak; we need to be mentally tough” in a game), she said.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

With respect to any other players with mental health challenges, Volz said that she encourages players to be forthcoming and to use resources, but that she was not aware of any other player with those issues this year. “I do ask if they’re ok, but if you choose not to tell me, I can’t be expected to know about it.”

[REDACTED]

In response, Volz said that if a player is crying during practice, she will ask them, in an affirming way, whether they need to leave practice to gather themselves. Relatedly, Volz said that this is one of the reasons she tries to connect with players at the start of each practice, to understand each player’s attitude on that particular day. Volz also described in detail the accommodations she makes for players to see their families when the team happens to be playing on the road in their home towns.

Allegation 4 – Alleged culture of fear and intimidation

A majority of those interviewed – players and staff – reported or agreed that Volz’s conduct has created an environment of fear and intimidation within the team. They described frequent aggressive and targeted yelling and displays of anger, both during practice (apparently as a coaching tactic) and occasionally in other interactions. One student said, “you can see a switch flip in her head when she gets mad.” A staff member described Volz as screaming and yelling at players, not teaching. Multiple individuals described Volz’s behavior as often “terrifying,” beyond what they would typically expect even from head coach in a competitive environment, and many players said that they were afraid of Volz because so many of her comments (described elsewhere in this memorandum) were directed to personal characteristics of the individual rather than their playing performance. Volz also was heard by multiple players and staff saying something to the effect of, the team will be miserable if she’s miserable, and she said she was pretty “fucking miserable.”

[REDACTED]

According to one player, on one occasion Volz stopped practice (screaming and yelling) and sent the team home, then walked out and left practice. The player indicated that practice continued under the assistant coaches.

More than half of the players reported that Volz cries often, and many on the team believe that this is a manipulation tool so that they will feel sorry for her. They mentioned feeling as if she always finds a way to make a situation about her personally and never about their needs or concerns. One student said that two weeks into the season, Volz screamed at her, "when are you going to start protecting me?"

Some players described Volz as "paranoid" and alleged that she separates players during warm-ups to manipulate team dynamics or conversations among the team that may not be favorable to her. A few players stated, "at times it also feels like coach is pitting us against each other trying to break us apart."

However, these views were not universally shared among the team. Four persons interviewed stated that Volz's demeanor during practices was to be expected from a Division I head coach: "I think the teammates are being a little bit sensitive." "To be a head coach, you have to be a bit crazy." "Some players have a lack of respect for the coach." "I think it's constructive coaching, not negative, but players are afraid of Coach Volz." "I haven't had any issues, she's more laid back with freshmen, but I can see why others she targets are complaining."

Volz defended her coaching style and described it as wholly appropriate in a Division I basketball program. She is strongly motivated by leading her team to success on the court: "We're trying to win games. If we aren't doing well, I'm going to make it better so we can win. We are consistent with workouts and the mindset of trying to improve, win or lose." She acknowledged that this past season was especially challenging, given the number of injuries and the challenge of working with an all-new staff. She did note improvement in the team's performance late in the season. She also observed that at least some of the concerns expressed by players may not have been as significant to them had the team won more often: "When you lose, everything's magnified."

At the same time, she said that she frequently reminds her players that "I care about you more as a person than a basketball player." She referred multiple times to occasions when players would hug her and tell her that they loved her. Volz also described working consistently to build positive team chemistry, including during off-court life skills and team-building activities, dinners and ice cream trips.

In her view, college basketball players generally are scared, on some level, of the head coach: "That goes with the territory." This is not necessarily because of the coach's tactics or demeanor, she explained, but due to the fact that the coach is the ultimate authority on the team and determines an individual's playing time. Volz described that, in fact, the team environment she believes has existed in her program has been more positive in the past three years than at any other time in her basketball experience.

[REDACTED]

Volz said that she will use yelling and a strict demeanor during practices as a tool to hold players accountable and teach discipline, which she views as part of her job – “to help them graduate from college, fight through adversity, and become successful in life.” Similarly, she said that if a player isn’t hustling, “you’re going to run.” “Effort and attitude are non-negotiables.” “I have great pride in this program and how it was built and because that’s what I believe in, and that’s how I expect our team to play, to put a good product on the floor.” She said that she has had players thank her for calling out other individuals for lack of effort.

At the same time, however, Volz said that she does not spend all practice yelling at players. She said she usually spends the first hour of practice walking around and observing, hardly saying anything. Volz also did not agree with the characterization of her having a “switch flip” in becoming angry.

Volz said that in the context of a practice, she will use a phrase like, “if I’m miserable, you’ll all be miserable,” as a motivational comment, which she attributes to another coach she admires. She shared that she rarely cusses and denied describing herself as “fucking miserable.” She said that she does recall ending practice early because of her dissatisfaction with the team’s performance in practice that day, but that this is not uncommon in college basketball (“we’re not accomplishing anything in this practice, so we’re done.”)

Volz also said that she views herself as adaptable, that she has changed to fit the changing times of college basketball, and that she is prepared to continue to adapt as needed to lead her team. She talked about the significant impact of the transfer portal, NIL, more involvement from parents and other aspects of the modern college sports landscape, and she explained that for any coach, it can be more challenging to build a positive and loyal team culture when there’s “no such thing as a four-year commitment anymore.”

Volz denied being “paranoid” about how she is perceived by the team. She knows that players will talk, and even at times complain, about a head coach. She denied that she separates players or organizes practices in order to control those dynamics. In fact, she reported that another staff member leads warm-ups, and players themselves generally pick the spots the start in.

Volz said that she recalled crying “two, maybe three, times this year.” On the most recent occasion, she said she broke down after practice a few hours after having to take her basset hound to the vet to be put down. More generally, she said she may have cried while interacting with the team because she cares about the success of her players and her team. She denied ever asking anyone to protect her.

Volz also indicated that concerns regarding team culture had never been brought to her attention this season, and that if players had raised these issues with assistant coaches, then it was the assistants’ responsibility to bring them to her attention. She explained that, on most teams, assistant coaches often have a better window on a player’s concerns than the head coach, given the authority dynamics.



Allegation 5 – Alleged inappropriate use of alcohol during team activities

A few players alleged that Volz used alcohol inappropriately in connection with team activities, but this allegation was not substantiated and was rebutted by most of the individuals I interviewed, including Volz. Most players and all staff members reported that they had never seen Volz drinking or offering drinks to players and had never seen Volz act inappropriately around the team due to alcohol use.

Policy Determinations

Human Resources is authorized to review and make determinations regarding alleged violations of the Harassment Avoidance Policy and the Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination Policy. Those policies prohibit workplace harassment and discrimination on the basis of race and sexual orientation, among other protected classes.

Based on my investigation, I have determined that Volz's conduct in this matter does not violate those policies. When viewed in the context of Volz's other efforts to connect with her players, comments regarding hair styles and similar matters do not indicate intentional race-based harassment or discrimination or rise to the level of a policy violation. Comments and actions that allegedly showed discrimination based on sexual orientation either were misconstrued or not substantiated as a policy violation.

Determinations regarding violations of any other University or Athletics policies, Volz's contract or any other relevant standards or directives are for Ms. Roybal to determine, as the Director of Athletics. I make no determinations regarding those matters.