

Seattle Schools pays former student record \$16 million to settle Garfield coach sex abuse lawsuit

Garfield High School in Seattle on January 22, 2021.



Ann Dornfeld

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KUOW Photo/Ann Dornfeld

Seattle Public Schools will pay \$16 million to settle a lawsuit by a former student who says two Garfield High School coaches sexually abused her for years, the largest-ever tort claim settlement in district history.

The woman, now 24, said Walter Junior Jones, a volunteer weight training coach, forcibly raped her in 2013 when she was a 13-year-old basketball prodigy practicing with the Garfield girls' team.

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Jones allegedly threatened to kill the girl and her family if she reported the abuse, which she said continued for two years.

Jones is awaiting trial in King County Superior Court on two counts of felony child rape.

The former student's lawsuit against Seattle Public Schools claimed that the district was negligent for allowing Jones to coach because he was barred from working anywhere in the district after being fired from another coaching job at Ballard High School.

At the time of the alleged abuse, Garfield athletic director Ed Haskins "wasn't certain, but thought he recalled an issue coming up regarding Jones' background check which prevented him from being vetted as a volunteer," according to a police report.

Still, Haskins told police that Jones was brought in to work with students independently. Jones was "not supposed to have access" to Garfield athletic facilities but "Jones used their facilities anyways," the police report said.

When the former student was 17, she said, Garfield basketball coach Marvin Wayne Hall, then 43, began an abusive sexual relationship with her. He allegedly had sex with her at the school and in hotel rooms when the team traveled.

At the time, she said, she thought he was her boyfriend, and only in adulthood realized that he had victimized her.

Hall, who was married at the time of the alleged abuse, filed a restraining order against the plaintiff in 2023 after she allegedly sent evidence of their relationship to his family.

"Mr. Hall was aware that another high school coach had previously raped me, and would tell me that nobody would believe me if I ever reported him," the woman testified in that case.

Hall, 50, was fired from his job as head coach of the Garfield girls' basketball team in 2022, and resigned from his security staff position, after a different student reported that Hall had told her he had a "crush" on her.

He faces a criminal charge of sexual misconduct with a minor in King County Superior Court involving the former student who filed the lawsuit.

Both former coaches say they are innocent, and the school district denied liability in settling the case.

“The district takes these incidents very seriously and has fully cooperated with law enforcement,” said spokesperson Bev Redmond. “Seattle Public Schools remains committed to its preventative trainings and to strengthening its procedures to prevent incidents like this from occurring in the future,” she said.

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"I believe the settlement really reflects, at least somewhat, the suffering that this victim had to go through," said Tomás Gahan, an attorney for the plaintiff.

Sports are “an environment that can be ripe for abuse,” Gahan said, given the amount of time coaches spend with children, often with minimal supervision, and the expectation that students will trust and obey their coaches as they continually seek their coach’s approval.

“There can't be this environment where coaches are able to insulate their interactions and the relationships with these players,” said Gahan, like traveling without parents and chaperones knowing students’ whereabouts at all times, and coaches being allowed to send students private text messages.

A [judge recently found](#) that Jones violated his pretrial release conditions last winter by attending at least 13 high school sporting events, including at Garfield, Chief Sealth International, Ballard, Ingraham, and Bellevue high schools, and Eastside Catholic School.

Seattle Public Schools will pay \$500,000 toward the tort settlement and legal fees, Redmond said. The Washington Schools Risk Management Pool, the district’s insurer, will pay the remainder of the landmark \$16 million settlement.

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