

# AHSAA doesn't like blowback on Maori Davenport decision

By Bill Rice

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By Bill Rice, a writer from Troy who can be reached at [wjricejunior@gmail.com](mailto:wjricejunior@gmail.com)

The Alabama High School Athletic Association and its executive director, Steve Savarese, are currently experiencing a hurricane of blowback regarding their ruling that cost Charles Henderson High School basketball star Maori Davenport the bulk of her senior season.

After being chastised by individuals and organizations far and wide, the organization released a statement that concludes by decrying "misstated facts."

Here are some facts that I don't think are "misstated."

Because of the ruling of one man, this young lady will not be allowed to play the game she loves, a game where she has become one of the best players her age in the country.

As Maori Davenport's identify is tied to her love of basketball, not allowing her to play her senior year -- a precious period of time she can never get back -- qualifies as cruel and excessive punishment.

Savarese didn't play Grinch to just one person, he also did it to a whole team, an entire student body, even an entire town.

If Maori Davenport was some "player for hire" on a travel ball team run by an unscrupulous coach; or was the next LeBron James getting under-the-table payments from some sneaker company; or if a rogue Charles Henderson "booster" was paying Maori to play for CHHS instead of, say, Pike County High School, yes, take away that which she cares most about -- her senior season.

But cashing a stipend check mailed to her by USA Basketball and then returning the money does not a "scandal" make.

Nor would the "integrity" of the AHSAA be put at risk if Maori were allowed to play this season. The opposite is probably true -- the integrity of the organization is being questioned because she is *not being allowed to play*.

Savarese's defense of his ruling can be succinctly summarized: A rule is a rule. If an organization has rules, it has to enforce them.

One imagines that if Savarese was a police officer and he clocked your car doing 26 mph in a 25-mph zone, he would pull you over and issue you a ticket. It wouldn't matter if your car was the only one on the road or the only reason you hit the accelerator was to avoid a puppy that was loitering on the curb.

Apparently there is a rule and, technically, it was violated.

It matters not if her violation was inadvertent or honest, or if no one was harmed, or that the rule breaker did not seek any money, or that the "tainted" money was returned, or that the real "guilty" party -- USA Basketball -- owned up to its "mistake" and indeed reported the error.

Nor does "intent" matter, or that a case like this had never happened before and almost assuredly will never happen again.

And if Maori Davenport is now considered a "professional athlete," I'm Michael Jordan.

What's really depressing is that the "rule-is-a-rule" group-thinkers seems to be completely indifferent to the real-world consequences suffered by Maori Davenport.

In defense of some macro ideal, and because of concern over future hypothetical cases that bear no resemblance to this one, they sacrificed the season of the organization's one student athlete who won a gold medal for her country.

Even today -- after a week of blowback from smart people all over the country -- they still don't get what they did was excessive and unnecessary.

I wish there was a rule that kept such people from obtaining positions of power.