

National outrage erupts over USA basketball star suspended by Alabama High School Athletic Association

Support for Maori Davenport is pouring in from across the nation as the USA under-18 star continues to be suspended from playing her senior season at Charles Henderson High School in Troy by the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA).

The AHSAA ruled Davenport ineligible after the forward/center cashed a check for \$857.20 that was mistakenly sent to her by USA Basketball as a stipend for lost wages and costs associated with representing her country over the summer.

On Thursday, [ESPN](#) picked up Davenport's story, which had thus far been chronicled mostly by local publications like the [Troy Messenger](#).

On November 30, the star Rutgers signee and defending state champion was reportedly getting ready for the fifth game of her senior season when she got the summons to her principal's office.

"I don't know what this is," Davenport told ESPN of her thinking at the time, "but it's probably not good."

Tipoff was hours away before the meeting. Afterwards, her high school basketball career was over.

Kelley and coach Dyneshia Jones told Davenport that she had been ruled ineligible for the rest of her senior season by the AHSAA. At issue was the stipend check for \$857.20 sent to Davenport by USA Basketball. She had led Team USA in rebounding and blocks en route to a gold medal in Mexico City at the FIBA Americas U18 Championship in August.

USA Basketball routinely pays players small amounts during its summer programs to help them recover costs, including lost wages and employment opportunities. Typically, they confer with high school federations to determine if players are allowed to accept payments.

But due to an error USA Basketball admits it made, no call was made to the AHSAA, which does not allow payments of more than \$250.

When USA Basketball realized its mistake, it notified Henderson, the AHSAA and Davenport. Davenport then sent the money back and self-reported the incident (her mother notified the AHSAA on her behalf).

However the AHSAA showed no flexibility, ending Davenport's season two days after being notified.

After hearing the news in her principal's office, Davenport called her grandfather, Moses Davenport.

"He's the toughest person I know," Davenport told ESPN in her first public comments on the matter. "He's survived four heart attacks. He told me that God has a plan for me."

AHSAA 'should be embarrassed,' 'ashamed of itself'

With the national spotlight now on the issue, outrage directed at the AHSAA is surging.

Renowned college basketball analyst Jay Bilas ripped the AHSAA for its decision in multiple tweets starting Friday.

“The Alabama High School Athletic Association should be embarrassed and, frankly, ashamed of itself over this ruling. The AHSAA acts as if the players exist for the AHSAA, and not the other way around. Just awful. Maori Davenport did NOTHING WRONG,” Bilas [said](#), tagging the official AHSAA account at the end.

Later, he [added](#), “On the side of harshly punishing a young player (for a clerical error) with ineligibility stands the Alabama High School Athletic Association. On the other side (reinstatement) stands, quite literally, everyone else. The AHSAA is wrong on this.”

More national basketball stalwarts are publicly joining Davenport’s defense, [including](#) the WNBA, NBA star Chris Paul and Spalding.

“No young woman should have her future jeopardized because of an unintentional administrative mistake,” Bethany Donaphin, head of WNBA league operations, explained. “When we heard Maori’s story, we wanted the AHSAA to know that we disagree with its decision and to let Maori know we support her right to play.”

Even Rutgers coach C. Vivian Stringer voiced her support, telling [NJ Advance Media](#), “Maori hadn’t done a doggone thing except receive the check from USA Basketball. It was grown-ups’ fault. And grown-ups did not lay claim to that. Maori sent the money back the next day. She’s a great kid, great student. She tried to do the right thing. And

then the Alabama association ... are you kidding me? This girl was up for player of the year, All-American. How can you do that?"

On Saturday, NBA star Demarcus Cousins chimed in, drawing from his personal experience. The Mobile native played at LeFlore Magnet High School in his hometown.

Cousins [tweeted](#), "What the Alabama High School Athletic Association has done to Maori Davenport is wrong on so many levels that I don't know where to start. I know what this feels like because I was treated like shit by them too. Being a kid from Alabama, I'm with Maori Davenport. Fix this now!"

What next?

There is also a [petition](#) circulating calling on the AHSAA to reinstate Davenport, but so far the association has shown no signs of budging.

Her one-year suspension has been upheld twice on appeal, once by an AHSAA district board and then by the association's central board. Davenport, who turned 18 on December 15, said that her holiday spirits have been dashed since that devastating meeting with her principal.

"I realize this is the reality," Davenport told [ESPN](#) softly. "But it hasn't gotten any easier."

She said one bright spot has been the support she has received from her community, and now prominent decision-makers across the state are becoming more vocal in advocating for Davenport, too.

In addition to the strong support of Rep. Kyle South (R-Fayette), who has been speaking out since [December](#) on the issue, Rep. Chris England (D-Tuscaloosa) has taken to social media in recent days criticizing the AHSAA.

"I would love to see a reasonable explanation for this one. Seems to me that the Alabama High School Athletic Association needs some oversight," England [said](#).

Rep. Wes Allen (R-Troy) [tweeted](#) that he is "exploring options to find a solution that remedies this unfortunate situation."

"I agree this is nonsense," Allen added.

The AHSAA has been silent on the issue since ESPN reported on the story Thursday.

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