

Maori Davenport's family files lawsuit against AHSAA so she can play HS basketball

[Josh Bean | jbean@al.com](mailto:jbean@al.com)

Updated Jan 11, 11:34 PM; Posted Jan 11, 10:17 AM

Looks like the Maori Davenport case is leaving the basketball court and headed to a courtroom.

Davenport's parents -- Mario and Tara -- filed a civil suit in Pike County against the Alabama High School Athletic Association and Executive Director Steve Savarese, asking the court to rule "any ruling by Savarese and/or the AHSAA is or may be ineligible to participate in the sport of basketball for the 2018-19 season is invalid" and restore her eligibility.

The suit also asks for an expedited hearing. No hearing date has been set.

"The rule that Maori was disqualified under is not only arbitrary in its application to Maori, but arbitrary on its face," the lawsuit reads. "It allows for no distinction for an innocent mistake ... it further allows only one punishment, whether the dollar amount involved is millions of dollars or \$250, a player is disqualified for a year, and if the defendants' public pronouncement are to be believed, there is no ability to make a distinction."

RELATED: [Read the complete lawsuit](#)

[The AHSAA suspended Davenport](#) in late November and has not played since.

"We received the Court's ruling entering a temporary restraining order this morning," AHSAA attorney Jim Williams wrote in an e-mail to AL.com. "We will honor and follow the Order of the Court. At the same time, we believe that the ruling by the Central Board of Control was an appropriate interpretation of the rules adopted by the schools and was applied accordingly."

[Davenport told AL.com earlier this week that she hopes the AHSAA will reverse course](#) and allow her to play.

Davenport -- the 6-foot-4 Rutgers signee and Miss Basketball frontrunner from Charles Henderson High in Troy -- received a check for \$857.20 from USA Basketball for playing for Team USA in the FIBA Americas U18 Tournament in Mexico City in August.

Payment for play violates [the AHSAA's "amateur rule" listed on pages 29-30 of the AHSAA online handbook](#). The punishment for breaking the rule is a one-season suspension from play.

USA Basketball officials admitted the organization mistakenly sent a check to Davenport.

[There's no evidence Davenport sought the payment](#), and USA Basketball stressed it erred in sending her the money, but no one from the school has disputed the rule was violated.

As a senior, the ruling essentially ended Davenport's high school career.

The case gained national notoriety after basketball analyst Jay Bilas wrote about the Davenport case and talked about it on ESPN. He criticized Savarese, and a number of prominent athletes, including Alabama native DeMarcus Cousins and Kobe Bryant, have voiced support for Davenport.

Alabama lawmakers have also voice support for Davenport, [including the Republican Caucus passing a resolution asking her to be reinstated](#).

Courts, especially in Alabama, have been reluctant to rule on high school athletic controversies and contradict the state association's rules. Last summer, for instance, [when a federal judge ruled against St. Paul's in its lawsuit against the AHSAA over its competitive balance rule](#), the judge wrote, "This Court may not substitute its judgment for that of the Association."

The 6-foot-4 Davenport led Charles Henderson to the Class 5A state title last year, averaging 18.2 points, 12 rebounds, 1.7 assists and 5.1 blocks per game. As a junior, she helped Charles Henderson finish as 5A runner-up and collected 20 points, 25 rebounds and an AHSAA single-game record of 19 blocked shots in the championship game.

Davenport finished runner-up in Miss Basketball voting last year and was third in 2017.

Most of Alabama's high school basketball teams play area games during January, and postseason play begins in February. The state tournament is scheduled for Feb. 25-March 2 at Birmingham's Legacy Arena.

Read the lawsuit:

[Davenport vs. AHSAA lawsuit](#) by on Scribd