

Jay Bilas reacts to story of a high school star's bizarre ineligibility ruling

By [Michelle R. Martinelli](#) January 5, 2019 7:22 pm



Maori Davenport, one of the top basketball recruits in the country, is no longer eligible to play in her senior high school season, according to a ruling made by Alabama High School Athletic Association.

She is ranked No. 15 prospect in the [espnW HoopGurlz Top 100](#) for 2019 and is committed to Rutgers. But because she received a \$857.20 stipend from USA Basketball for helping Team USA win gold at the FIBA Americas U18 Championship in August, the AHSAA declared her ineligible for her final high school season, [espnW reported](#). To maintain amateur status, the athletic association only allows payments [up to \\$250](#).

USA Basketball realized its mistake and told Davenport's high school

and the athletic association, and she returned the check. But the athletic association still will not reverse its ruling.

Jay Bilas, a [longtime critic](#) of hypocritical amateurism rules, explained the situation during the broadcast of Alabama's 77-75 upset of No. 13 Kentucky on Saturday and blasted the AHSAA for the decision.

"This is a travesty and it is wrong." [@JayBilas](#) believes Maori Davenport should be allowed to play. pic.twitter.com/U29B0eEmNH

— espnW (@espnW) [January 5, 2019](#)

Bilas broke it all down:

"It's really a travesty. She was ruled ineligible by the Alabama High School Athletic Association. And it's not just that. It was the sole decision of the executive director, Steve Savarese, and it was all over a check that she received from USA Basketball. She played on the USA Basketball U18 international team, played in Mexico City, won a gold medal, played for her country. All the players get a stipend check. It was \$850 and change, and USA Basketball always checks with each high school association — there are only a couple of high school players on the team.

"It slipped through the cracks. It was an administrative error — a clerical error — and she received the check. And then the high school association said, nope, your amateur status is now gone. And as soon as USA Basketball found the error, they notified the high school, the athletic association — the Alabama athletic association was notified — and she sent the money back. No big deal, right? Not for the Alabama high school athletic association.

“There is one person standing in the way, and that is executive director Steve Savarese and he refuses to rescind this ruling. Rulings in the past have been rescinded, although there has never been anything like this in the history of the Alabama athletic association. They’ve never had a case like this; Steve Savarese admitted that to me when I spoke to him on Friday. Never had a case anywhere near like this. But in other eligibility cases, they have rescinded rulings that they’ve made, and they need to rescind this one.

“This is a travesty, and it is wrong. Maori Davenport did absolutely nothing wrong. She should be allowed to play.”

A student at Charles Henderson High School in Troy, Alabama, Davenport led her team to its first state title in program history last season, and she was named the MVP after almost getting a triple-double. She scored 17 points and added 13 rebounds, nine blocks and four steals in the title game, [according to AL.com](#).

This controversial ineligibility ruling will not impact her status with Rutgers, and USA Basketball spokesman Craig Miller said, [via espnW](#):

“The NCAA allows us to pay athletes — who have no remaining high school eligibility — a small amount for the sake of representing the USA. Typically, if we have an athlete with high school eligibility remaining, we will check with their athletic association because the rules are different in each state.

“But we didn’t realize [Davenport] had high school eligibility remaining, and it was absolutely our mistake.”

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