

# Maori Davenport's eligibility fight is over, but the state may still want her school to pay its legal fees

[Jacob Bogage](#)

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Maori Davenport [fought for her right to play her senior year of high school basketball](#). Her parents and high school went to court on her behalf. Sports icons, including Kobe Bryant and Billie Jean King, made her struggle a national issue. ESPN college basketball analyst Jay Bilas campaigned on her behalf during national broadcasts.

But Davenport's high school basketball career is over, and yet the Alabama High School Athletic Association is not done with her.

Even after her team was knocked out of the state playoffs and her family's legal fight to preserve her eligibility was rendered moot, the AHSAA left open the possibility of wanting to litigate the case to both establish judicial precedent and recoup its legal fees from Davenport's high school, Charles Henderson High in Troy.

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"We received a Motion to Dismiss filed by Plaintiff's attorney Thursday," the AHSAA said in a statement provided to The Washington Post. "Before we had an opportunity to file an objection, an Order was entered by the Court dismissing this case. We did not consent to the dismissal. The Association will discuss its options at its next scheduled Board meeting."

The [AHSAA's handbook](#) states, "Any member school that sues the AHSAA, or is involved in a suit against the AHSAA, and loses the case shall be required to pay all legal expense in the litigation."

Henderson High was listed as a defendant in the case along with the AHSAA, but the school's administration was active in advocating for Davenport. Henderson Principal Brock Kelley declined to comment to The Post on Saturday.

Davenport's plight made national news at the start of her senior season when the AHSAA declared her ineligible after she received a check for "lost wages" while helping Team USA win a gold medal at the FIBA Americas U-18 Championship last summer in Mexico City. The Davenport family was unaware that accepting the payment from USA Basketball, legal under NCAA rules, would jeopardize her amateur status in the eyes of the state of Alabama.

USA Basketball was supposed send the check only if an athlete's home state allowed such payments, but forgot to verify whether that was the case for Davenport. When notified she should not have received payment, Davenport returned the money and alerted the AHSAA about the mix-up. USA Basketball acknowledged and took responsibility for the error, stating publicly Davenport and her family

never sought the payment.

The AHSAA still ruled her amateur status was nullified and declared Davenport, a Rutgers commit, ineligible to play her senior season, then [fought the suit brought by her family](#) to uphold its decision. Her parents asked in January for an injunction to prevent the AHSAA from enforcing its ruling.

Davenport [played in several games](#) after Pike County Circuit Court Judge Henry T. Reagan II granted an emergency motion that restored her eligibility before the case came to trial. Her family requested an expedited hearing "due to the fact that the season is finite and that postseason play in the sport of basketball begins in February of this year."

But Henderson lost unexpectedly in the state quarterfinals on Wednesday without Davenport in the lineup, ending her senior season. Her family asked Reagan to dismiss the case against the AHSAA. Hours after the game, he did, and ordered each side to pay their own legal expenses. But the AHSAA responded that it "did not consent" to the motion, even after asking to dismiss the case twice earlier in the year.

"I believe there is some common sense on the AHSAA board and there are some people of good will at the AHSAA who think this rule is extremely flawed," Carl Cole, the Davenport's attorney, said in a phone interview. "I believe this rule is going to be changed at some point, hopefully to reward people like Maori who come forward and self-report rather than people who like and try to hide and obfuscate."

The three-month saga united Republicans and Democrats in the state

legislature and a bill has strong bipartisan support, [according to AL.com](#), to increase government oversight of the AHSAA. Maori Davenport's mother, Tara Davenport, said the legal battle, though it didn't accomplish its final goal, was worth it.

"Our goal for the lawsuit was for my daughter, Maori, to play her senior season," [she told the website](#) in a text message. "She played and now the season [is] over after the loss on yesterday. Now, I will do everything I can do to make sure this never happens to another student-athlete at the request of Maori."

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