

July 3rd, 2023

To:

David L. Baker

Associate Athletic Director, Penn State University

103 Bryce Jordan Center, University Park, PA 16802

Dear Mr. Baker,

I've addressed this letter to you in the hope that you will forward it on to the appropriate people at Penn State University for their review. You have always been helpful and responsive to my questions and needs getting started in the program, and I am grateful to you for it. Please know this is very difficult for me, as I've grown attached to the athletes and the potential the program has to build athletes capable of competing at the highest levels in the sport.

This is not a formal complaint. The program has suffered enough for so many years. I simply want my voice to be heard and the people making important decisions the opportunity to view things from a different perspective.

My background is an elite athlete and coach for more than 25 years. It's important to highlight my experience being forced to change national teams from Poland to the US because of a toxic Polish system that valued silence and servitude over the interests of athletes and athletic achievement. It took the court of Arbitration in Sports to intervene for me to achieve my dream of competing in my 5th Olympic games. As I understand it, I was recruited by Penn State partly because of my reputation in the saber fencing world to help rehabilitate a program with a gender based title IX complaint.

As rightly required by Penn State, I've taken mandatory training about title IX, Discrimination, bias, intolerance, equal access and affirmative action. While the university has these great policies, fencing is a heavily male dominated sport. Despite athletes being equally men and women, there are no female national head coaches across all of saber fencing and women are heavily under represented as club owners and NCAA head coaches. I accepted the assistant coach position to continue working with high level athletes and build my resume for national level opportunities. My role in athlete development and recruiting with PSU while staying engaged with Team USA this last year was very constructive.

When I applied for the head coach position at Penn State, I believed that my experience, history working through years of discrimination and being the only female on staff in a program with a title IX complaint, that I would at least merit an interview. Even when it became obvious that I was not being considered, I again asked for an interview so that my opinion on the way forward for the program could at least be heard and considered. I was offered no explanation as to why I was not interviewed despite being an internal candidate. In these circumstances, it seems to me reasonable to assume that factors outside my professional competence may possibly have played some role in the decision not to interview or consult with me.

The University has the right to talk to and hire whomever they wish, with whatever criteria they decide. I respect that. But PSU Fencing has an image problem, and this perception of discrimination and bias exists. I would strongly urge at least reviewing the head coach criteria and candidate pool you interviewed through the lens of Title IX, AD91, HR01, AD29, HR101 and especially HR11. This might inspire opportunity for viable underrepresented candidates to present ideas about advancing the program.

As requested, I spoke to the new head coach. The results of my conversation with him on the 2nd of July was disappointing to say the least. At no point did he raise his vision for PSU fencing, saber fencing or the requirements for my retention at the University. Instead he focused on the club he intended to open at state college and his intentions to have me work there. I said I wasn't interested in working at his club. I focused on the other important activities I'm involved in that elevate the Penn State program, such as being designated team USA coach at international competitions, the IOC national coaches' program and work supporting Irish fencing with their women in fencing initiative (in accordance with AD77 and agreed to by all during my initial hiring).

He responded by questioning my "commitment to the program". It appeared he was more interested in leveraging his new position to start his own club rather than advancing the PSU fencing program. After the conversation, I was left with the strong impression that my potential assistant coach job with the University is tied to working for him at his club and cutting ties with the national team, Ireland and my continuing education. A curious approach from a professional incoming coach.

I was open to listening to him, despite my disappointment with the recruiting process. His focus on a private club and his failure to engage with me about my professional opinion, needs or possible future role at Penn State was inappropriate and plainly wrong. I was ignored by the University, and talked down to by the head coach. It's now apparent that PSU is no longer the right fit for me.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I did enjoy my year with PSU, and want nothing but the best for the great group of athletes you have competing for the Nittany Lions. PSU fencing has a lot of potential. I genuinely hope it gets the leadership and dedication it deserves.

Sincerely,

Aleksandra Shelton

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