

The Behrend Beacon

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Student, 19, sues University of Miami for harassment

by Jay Weaver
Knight Ridder Newspapers

Nicole Pytel says she grew up idolizing the University of Miami and its Hurricanes football teams.

Her father, Lewis, quarterbacked the Canes in the late 1960s. A year and a half ago, she entered UM and earned a spot as an assistant equipment manager - an athletic scholarship that helped pay her \$22,000 tuition.

The dream, she says, is over.

Pytel is suing the school, alleging sexual discrimination and harassment on the job after UM administrators removed her last February - less than one hour after Pytel filed a complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

"By the end of the season, it was just more than I could take," said Pytel, 19, of Weston, Fla., who entered UM in August 2000. "Something had to be done."

UM spokeswoman Sarah Artecona declined comment, citing school policy. She also said UM would not disclose its internal review of Pytel's initial complaint last January.

In September, the EEOC issued Pytel a "right to sue" letter but did not reach any conclusions about her claims that she endured "inquisitions" about her sex life and body parts by the male assistants and her supervisor.

"Based upon its investigation, the EEOC is unable to conclude that the information obtained establishes violations of the statutes," the EEOC's Miami district office wrote Sept. 13.

So Pytel sued Dec. 11 in Miami-Dade Circuit Court. She claims male equipment managers either harassed her by commenting on her breast size, telling her to wear thong panties or following her around the practice field simulating sex acts.

Pytel claims the team's equipment manager, Bobby Revilla, who supervised Pytel, encouraged the offensive behavior during a Rutgers road trip Sept. 29, 2000. In the suit, she claims Revilla said

in front of the staff: "Maybe if we get you to drink something, you will tell us about what you and (your boyfriend) have done in bed."

Revilla told The Miami Herald that UM's legal counsel advised him not to comment.

In the suit, Pytel said that after she complained to UM officials last January, she received two anonymous phone calls to her apartment threatening her with retaliation when she returned for training camp last spring.

A month later, on Feb. 23, the university removed Pytel from her job, saying it was for her own safety, according to the suit. The other female assistant

manager, Lisa Klein, did not lodge a complaint with the school. She could not be reached for comment.

UM officials tried to find Pytel a work-study job in the communications department,

but Pytel said it paid considerably less than her assistant manager post. The football job paid her \$2,500 last year and would have increased to \$5,000 this year, she said.

"It was illegal for them to remove her for retaliation," said her attorney, Donna Ballman.

Lewis Pytel, who helped his daughter get her UM job, called the school's handling of the case "a very big disappointment."

"She was afraid of losing her job if she complained. And when she did, that's exactly what happened," said Pytel, a UM quarterback in 1968 and 1969.

Nicole Pytel, a broadcast and psychology major, said being on the sidelines this year during the Hurricanes' stellar season is hard.

Currently, she hosts a student TV program on sports but had no desire to go to the Rose Bowl on Thursday when top-ranked UM meets Nebraska for the national championship.

"I don't want to think it's football season, it's too painful to watch," she said.

"Pytel is suing the school, alleging sexual discrimination and harassment on the job."

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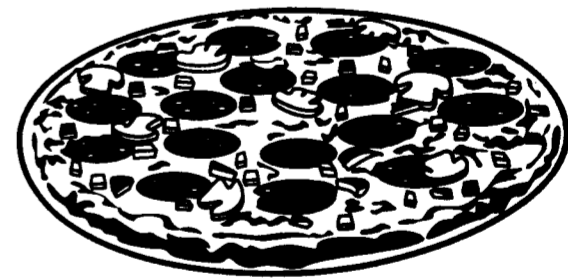
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