

As more accusers come forward, debate over Paterno's legacy grows

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With a single paragraph in an otherwise unnoticed legal ruling this week, a Philadelphia judge reignited the contentious debate over Joe Paterno's legacy - and revived a scandal that Pennsylvania State University had hoped it had moved beyond.

The court filing cited a settlement that the school paid to a man who said he told the legendary football coach in 1976 that assistant coach Jerry Sandusky had sexually assaulted him.

By Friday, more accusers had come forward with claims that they, too, had alerted Paterno or others on his staff to Sandusky's sexual misconduct decades before it drew law enforcement scrutiny.

A 60-year-old State College man told CNN that Paterno pressured him in 1971 not to report that Sandusky had raped him. And NBC News, citing anonymous sources, reported that "as many as six" of Paterno's longtime assistants might have witnessed inappropriate be-

havior involving Sandusky and boys dating back to the 1970s.

Both reports were roundly denounced by Paterno family members, who have also challenged the allegations underlying three settlements tied to abuse allegedly reported to Paterno or his assistants in the 1980s.

None of the claims has been publicly aired or proven in court. However, their emergence has underlined questions raised by some members of Penn State's trustee board about how much they were told about the specific allegations lodged by Sandusky accusers while approving nearly \$93 million in settlement payments to 32 people since 2013.

A university spokesman declined to discuss any of the claims that emerged Friday.

"Allegations of various kinds have been made, and will likely continue to be made," the spokesman said in a statement. "The university does not speculate publicly or hypothesize about individual allegations. These are sensitive matters, and we want to be respectful of the rights of all individuals involved. It would be inappropriate to do otherwise."

Sandusky is serving a 30- to 60-year prison sentence for his conviction in the sexual abuse of 10 children between 1994 and 2008.

The man who spoke Friday to CNN, whose identity was withheld, was among 25 Sandusky accusers who received payouts from Penn State in 2013, the network reported. But he said his allegations about Paterno were not raised during the settlement negotiations.

He alleged that Sandusky picked him up while he was hitchhiking in 1971. The assistant coach, then only a year into his job at Penn State, bought him beer and gave him marijuana before attacking him at a urinal in a campus bathroom.

Later, the man said, his foster mother contacted the university, and he was put on the phone with two men who introduced themselves only as Jim and Joe. Both accused him of making up the story and threatened to call police if he told anyone else, the man told CNN.

"There was no question in my mind who Joe was," he said. "I've heard that voice a million times. It was Joe Paterno."

Sandusky retired from the university in 1999. Paterno's family has dismissed any allegation that the head coach knew about Sandusky's sexual misconduct until his November 2011 arrest. Paterno died months later of lung cancer.

Responding Saturday to the CNN story on Twitter, Scott Paterno, one of the coach's sons, characterized the accusers' claims as little more than "toothless stories."

Penn State has said it has "no records from the time to help evaluate the claims" and would not discuss its confidential settlement agreements.

Keith Masser, chairman of the university's board, and other trustees said Friday that they did not recall being told of allegations involving Paterno when he and the rest of the board voted to approve settlements the school offered Sandusky's accusers.

In evaluating how to respond to the Sandusky abuse claims, he said, trustees also weighed the impact of protracted and costly litigation on the school. "Some of these claims were paid out of economics," he said.

Still, when Paterno and others at the school first knew of Sandusky's sexual abuse could shape the outcome of the fight playing out in Philadelphia Common Pleas Court between Penn State and its insurer, the Pennsylvania Manufacturers' Association Insurance Co., over who should bear the costs of the Sandusky settlements.

In his ruling last week, Judge Gary S. Glazer wrote that "by cloaking [Sandusky] with a title that enabled

him to perpetuate his crimes, PSU must assume some responsibility for what he did both on and off campus."

More immediately, the accusations have once again thrown into doubt the future of Paterno's reputation on a campus where talk of the Sandusky scandal still rankles.

Penn State's board fired Paterno in 2011 days after Sandusky was charged. A year later, the NCAA stripped more than 100 wins from Paterno's record, and school officials removed his statue from outside Beaver Stadium.

The wins were restored last year. And recently, some trustees and Paterno loyalists have started discussions about returning the statue or finding some other way to honor the coach on campus.

Philadelphia lawyer Tom Kline, who has negotiated settlements on behalf of Sandusky victims, said Friday that the new claims could throw all of that into doubt.

"Those, like myself, intimately involved in the settlement negotiating process, have been aware of claims dating back into the 1970s," he said. "The connection in Judge Glazer's opinion to Mr. Paterno provides one more link in the chain which has been repeatedly denied by those who refuse to come to terms with the tragic reality here."