

Volleyball player sues coach and UC, says she was kicked off team for 'sexy' photos

[Kate Murphy](#), kmurphy@enquirer.com Published 1:07 p.m. ET March 27, 2018 | Updated 1:58 p.m. ET March 28, 2018

A former University of Cincinnati volleyball player says she was kicked off the team because her **Instagram photos** were "too sexy," according to a federal lawsuit filed last week.

Shalom Ifeanyi, 19, is suing UC and volleyball coach Molly Alvey for racial discrimination, sex discrimination, sexual harassment and retaliation. Ifeanyi says she was removed from the team because she did not fit the "biased image" of a UC volleyball player.

Ifeanyi, who is seeking compensatory damages, punitive damages and attorney fees, could not be immediately reached for comment. UC Athletics spokesman Ryan Koslen said the university had no comment on the pending legal matter.

At a meeting in June, Alvey pointed to a photo on Ifeanyi's Instagram and said to Ifeanyi, according to the lawsuit: "When football players see this, what do you think they see? They see your breasts. It's seductive."

Alvey asked her to delete the photo immediately, which Ifeanyi did. About 10 days later, she was dismissed from the team.

Ifeanyi, who transferred from Oregon State University, joined the volleyball team on scholarship in 2017 after she was recruited by Alvey. When she arrived on campus, according to the lawsuit, "Alvey began harassing and shaming (Ifeanyi) about pictures she was posting on her personal social media accounts."

Alvey told Ifeanyi that many of her photos were "too sexy," though Ifeanyi was fully clothed in all the photos Alvey criticized, according to the lawsuit.

No other members of the team, who were "of slighter build and lighter complexion," were reprimanded for their photos, even those taken in bikinis, the lawsuit says.

Ifeanyi deleted the photos and started posting headshots on her social media profiles.



A former UC volleyball player says she was criticized by her coach for her social media photos. (Photo: Photo of exhibits in lawsuit)

During the spring 2017 season, Ifeanyi trained with the team while recovering from knee surgery. That June, she met with Alvey to discuss her rehab process and the upcoming season.

That's when Alvey started questioning Ifeanyi about her Instagram and demanded that she delete a certain photo.

A couple days later, Alvey texted Ifeanyi more photos and told her to remove them as well, according to the lawsuit. In response, Ifeanyi defended her photos and accused the coach of body shaming.

"I feel like I'm being body shamed because I'm not flat chested," Ifeanyi wrote in a text to Alvey, the lawsuit states. "I'm not trying to show my boobs coach, I can't make them go away. In these pictures I just got my hair done and really liked my makeup and thought the pictures were pretty. My teammates have swimsuit photos that are more revealing than me in a tank top."

Ifeanyi said she would delete them but didn't think it was fair.

"There's a history of black women because of their bodies being sexualized and that's what appears to be happening to me," she wrote. "I can't help the way I'm built. I am not trying to argue, I just feel like I have to be flat chested or real skinny in order to post."

Alvey did not respond to that text.

Ifeanyi continued to train with the team during preseason and was awarded top performer of the week by the strength training coach, the lawsuit says.

A few days after that recognition, at the end of June, Alvey called Ifeanyi into her office and dismissed her from the team.

The explanation, according to the lawsuit: Alvey and Ifeanyi had "different philosophies."

UC's executive senior associate athletic director Maggie McKinley was also at that meeting and supported the decision for UC to "part ways" with Ifeanyi.

Ifeanyi had to return her gear and remove all of her belongings from her athletic form room because another student-athlete was moving in.

Ifeanyi filed a complaint with UC's Title IX Office. Since then, nine months have passed and UC hasn't completed its investigation or offered Ifeanyi a chance to appeal the decision to remove her from the team and remove her scholarship for next year, according to the lawsuit.

More than 8,000 individuals have signed a Care2 petition demanding UC fire Alvey.

NCAA transfer rules prohibit Ifeanyi from playing volleyball at another school for the 2018-19 season. That means she won't have athletic scholarship money to help pay for tuition.

Now, she's been forced to "enroll in another university to complete her undergraduate studies and has lost earning capacity due to the delay and disruption in her education," according to the lawsuit.