

# Detroit Free Press

---

## NEWS

# MSU gymnastics coach Kathie Klages retires as allegations stack up

**Matt Mencarini** Lansing State Journal

Published 1:22 p.m. ET Feb. 14, 2017 | Updated 9:05 p.m. ET Feb. 14, 2017

MSU head women's gymnastics coach Kathie Klages retired Tuesday, a day after the university suspended her and hours after a second woman said in court documents that the coach discouraged her years ago from reporting concerns about disgraced MSU doctor Larry Nassar.

Court documents filed Tuesday morning allege that Klages in 1997 asked a teenage girl if Nassar had performed procedures that included digital vaginal and anal penetration on her. When the girl said yes, "Klages told (her) that there is no reason to bring up Nassar's conduct," attorneys wrote in the court documents.

The woman, identified in court documents as Jane IMSU Doe, is the second alleged victim to make allegations against Klages in recent weeks. Court documents filed last month allege that in the late 1990s Klages cautioned a different teenage girl who came forward with concerns about Nassar's treatment of her that filing a complaint could lead to "serious consequences" not only for Nassar but for her.

## **Related:**

### **Should MSU be leading the Nassar investigation?**

### **At MSU: Assault, harassment and secrecy**

Shirlee Bobryk, Klages' attorney, said in a statement that her client "would never do anything" to put the MSU gymnastics team members and coaching staff at risk and that she trusted Nassar "to competently and ethically treat her team members."

"Like many others, MSU Gymnastics Coach, Kathie Klages, is deeply disturbed by the recent allegations and lawsuits brought against Dr. Larry Nassar, Michigan State University, and others," Bobryk said. "Although she is not a named defendant in any lawsuit, she is extremely

distressed by the accusations that have been made about her creating any sort of impediment to gymnasts reporting complaints of criminal sexual conduct or sexually inappropriate behavior.”

Bobryk told the State Journal Klages’ retirement was effective immediately.

The court documents filed Tuesday morning in Grand Rapids also allege that Nassar held down the teenage girl who “specifically declined” an intervaginal procedure and performed it against her will.

The teen’s conversation with Klages came before the incident in which the girl was held down, according to the woman’s attorney, David Mittleman. Nassar treated his client several times in 1997, according to court documents, although Mittleman said the appointment during which she was held was either the last or next-to-last time she sought treatment from Nassar.

The university suspended Klages on Monday but declined to say why.

“The underlying accusations involving Ms. Klages have been a serious distraction to her professional responsibilities and detrimental to her overall well-being,” Bobryk said in the statement. “Her recent suspension as head coach is a consequence of that.”

MSU spokesman Jason Cody declined to comment on the allegations but said that Klages had informed the university of her decision to retire.

Jane IMSU Doe’s allegations in the documents filed Tuesday in federal court are among those from four women who are seeking to join a federal lawsuit against MSU, Nassar, USA Gymnastics and Twistars gymnastics club in Dimondale.

That lawsuit, filed Jan. 10 in federal court in Grand Rapids, is the largest against Nassar, a former MSU doctor, and the university. The lawsuit will have 35 plaintiffs with the addition of the four who filed motions Tuesday. It started with 18.

Previous court documents filed in the lawsuit have alleged that MSU staff was aware of allegations against Nassar as early as 1998; that a university official told a women’s athletics team not to answer questions from police about Nassar; that a current scholarship athlete was told her cell phone was subject to checks by university staff; and that in December a coach said the child pornography found on Nassar’s computers or hard drives might have been planted to frame the doctor.

MSU Athletic Director Mark Hollis and Klages met on Monday to discuss an allegation that the gymnastics team was discouraged from answering questions from police about Nassar during a meeting in September, according to a letter from Hollis to Klages that the university provided to the State Journal.

MSU letter to Kathie Klages by LansingStateJournal on Scribd

Hollis wrote in the letter that it appears the focus of the September meeting was to discuss the Nassar allegations, which had just been made public by the Indianapolis Star, and how to handle “communications with the media.”

At the conclusion of that meeting, according to Hollis’ letter, Klages shared a “highly emotional sense of shock” about the Nassar allegations, which confused several athletes about who they could or should speak with about the situation.

“While I acknowledge you provided student-athletes with information about reporting to the Office of Institutional Equity, your passionate defense of Dr. Nassar created an emotionally charged environment for the team,” Hollis wrote. “That has not abated and my concerns led me to suspend you with pay.”

The university has declined to comment on specific allegations but said its police department is investigating all allegations. MSU fired Nassar in September.

To date, at least 40 women or girls have filed at least six lawsuits against Nassar. Two of those lawsuits name MSU as a co-defendant and several name USA Gymnastics as a co-defendant.

To date, at least 36 women or girls are involved in two lawsuits against MSU, and Nassar has been sued by 39 women in at least six lawsuits.

Klages’ suspension has renewed calls for an independent investigation of who at the university knew of allegations before they became public in September.

“At this point in the investigation I believe that MSU (police) seem to be doing a fine job on the criminal investigation of (Nassar),” Mittleman said. “But it’s time now to turn over the civil and criminal investigations as they relate to MSU to an independent investigating authority.”

He suggested the Michigan State Police or the FBI.

John Manly, a California-based attorney who represents nearly two dozen women who have sued MSU and Nassar, said Monday that Klages' suspension "...points out now more than ever why there needs to be a fully independent investigation of MSU."

A spokeswoman for Attorney General Bill Schuette, who is prosecuting the case, said he doesn't have the authority to appoint a different law enforcement agency to lead an investigation and that he supports MSU Police Chief Jim Dunlap.

Nassar, 53, of Holt, worked for decades at MSU and with USA Gymnastics. Since September, more than 60 women or girls have made sexual assault allegations about Nassar to law enforcement, officials have said. Many of the allegations date back decades and involve medical appointments.

Nassar faces three first-degree criminal sexual conduct charges in Ingham County and three federal charges related to possessing, obtaining or destroying child pornography images or videos.

However, he has not been charged with crimes related to his role as a doctor for the university.

*Contact Matt Mencarini at (517) 267-1347 or mmencarini@lsj.com. Follow him on Twitter @MattMencarini. Or add him on Signal, a messaging app with end-to-end encryption, at 517-281-1939.*

## **What's next**

A preliminary hearing for Larry Nassar, 53, of Holt, is scheduled Friday in 55th District Court in Mason. The hearing will determine if there's enough evidence for Nassar to stand trial in Circuit Court on three sexual assault charges.