

# THE DAILY NONPAREIL

## Michigan State athletic director retires over Nassar sex abuse

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EAST LANSING, Mich. — Michigan State University's athletic director retired Friday, two days after the university president resigned over the school's handling of sexual abuse allegations against its disgraced former sports doctor, Larry Nassar.

Mark Hollis, who had been in the job for 10 years, disclosed the move during a meeting with a small group of reporters on campus. He was asked why he would not stay on.

"Because I care," Hollis said, holding back tears. "When you look at the scope of everything, that's the reason I made a choice to retire now. And I hope that has a little bit, a little bit, of helping that healing process."

Hours later, the university named its vice president to serve as acting president after the departure of President Lou Anna Simon. Bill Beekman is expected to serve briefly in the role until the board of trustees can hire an interim president and then a permanent leader.

Also Friday, USA Gymnastics confirmed that its entire board of directors would resign as requested by the U.S. Olympic Committee. The USOC had threatened to decertify the organization, which besides picking U.S. national teams is the umbrella organization for hundreds of clubs across the country.

Some of the nation's top gymnasts, including Olympians Aly Raisman, McKayla Maroney, Simone Biles and Jordyn Wieber, said they were among Nassar's victims.

At the university board's meeting, Chairman Brian Breslin said it was "clear that MSU has not been focused enough on the victims." The trustees, he said, want to resume discussions with those who have sued the school to "reach a fair and just conclusion." Talks broke down last year.

The board plans to ask an independent third party to review health and safety at the school, and it wants state Attorney General Bill Schuette to consider appointing a neutral investigator to conduct an inquiry of the Nassar matter "to promote bipartisan acceptance of the results." Schuette, who is running for governor, will further detail his probe in a news conference Saturday.

Trustee Brian Mosallam addressed his remarks toward the victims: "I am so truly sorry. We failed you."

Beekman is vice president and secretary of the board. He began working at the university in 1995 and previously led the MSU Alumni Association. He has an undergraduate degree from MSU.

"I think our culture here at Michigan State clearly needs to improve," he said. "We need to be able to make everybody that comes on our campus feel safe."

Simon submitted her resignation Wednesday after Nassar, a former Michigan State employee, was sentenced to 40 to 175 years in prison for molesting young girls and women under the guise of medical treatment.

Several of the 150-plus victims who spoke at his sentencing hearing were former athletes at the school, and many victims accused the university of mishandling past complaints about Nassar.

"I don't believe that I've ever met him," Hollis said of Nassar. He insisted he did not know about complaints of abuse until an Indianapolis Star report in 2016.

Gov. Rick Snyder said Friday he is mulling an inquiry into the university, depending on whether it would interfere with other investigations such as the attorney general's. Under the state constitution, the governor can remove or suspend public officers for "gross neglect of duty," corruption or "other misfeasance or malfeasance."

"The governor hasn't seen enough done for the survivors after everything they've gone through," spokeswoman Anna Heaton said. "He wants to make sure that something is being done."

U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos confirmed Friday that her agency is also investigating the Nassar scandal. She said in a statement that what happened at the school is "abhorrent" and "cannot happen ever again — there or anywhere."

The Education Department was already reviewing separate complaints about the school's compliance with Title IX, the law that requires public schools to offer equal opportunities to both genders, and

compliance with requirements about providing campus crime and security information.

The board expressed support for Simon before her resignation, but she faced pressure from many students, faculty and legislators. While there has been no evidence that Simon or Hollis knew of Nassar's sexual abuse, some of the women and girls who accused him said they complained to university employees as far back as the late 1990s.

Board members, who are elected in statewide votes, have also come under intense scrutiny. Two announced they will not seek re-election. Another, Joel Ferguson, apologized at the meeting for conducting an interview in which he said there was more going on at Michigan State than "this Nassar thing."

The university faces lawsuits from more than 130 victims. Ferguson previously had said victims were ambulance chasers seeking a payday. The school resisted calls for an independent investigation before asking Schuette for a review a week ago.

Dozens of Michigan State students gathered Friday evening on campus to protest the school's handling of the Nassar allegations. Some were expected to march to the Breslin Center where the men's basketball team was hosting Wisconsin Friday night.

Organizers called for students attending the game to wear teal-colored T-shirts in the "Izzone," a vocal student cheering section named after head basketball coach Tom Izzo.

In a recent filing, Michigan State asked a judge to dismiss the lawsuits on technical grounds. The school says it has immunity under state law and that the majority of victims were not MSU students at the time of the alleged assaults.

"These arguments can seem disrespectful" to victims, but a defense is required by Michigan State's insurers, Simon wrote last week in a campus-wide email. She added, "We have the utmost respect and sympathy" for victims.

The board last month authorized the creation of a \$10 million fund to offer victims counseling and mental health services.

A Title IX probe conducted by the university cleared Nassar of sexual assault allegations in 2014. He was advised by the school to avoid being alone with patients while treating their "sensitive areas," but the school did not follow up on and enforce its request.

At least 12 reported assaults occurred after the investigation ended, according to a university police report that was provided to the FBI for review by the U.S. attorney.

Hollis said he did not know about the 2014 investigation and has told as much to the FBI and campus police.

Former Michigan State rower Cate Hannum, who was treated by Nassar and wrote an open letter criticizing Simon's handling of the case almost a year ago, said Hollis would not be retiring if he had "approached the situation with integrity from the very beginning instead of adopting a not-my-problem attitude."

Now it doesn't matter what Hollis did for MSU athletics, she said, "because he will be remembered for egregiously failing his female athletes."