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## SPORTS

# Steve Penny, Former USA Gymnastics President, Is Arrested in Tennessee

Indictment alleges Penny ordered removal of documents from training facility



Steve Penny, the former president of USA Gymnastics, in Washington in June. PHOTO: LEAH MILLIS/REUTERS

By *Rebecca Davis O'Brien*

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The former president of USA Gymnastics was arrested in Tennessee on Wednesday on evidence-tampering charges stemming from a Texas investigation into sexual-abuse allegations and other misconduct at the women's national gymnastics team's training camp, officials said.

Steve Penny was indicted on Sept. 28 by a grand jury in Walker County, Texas. Mr. Penny was forced out of USA Gymnastics in March 2017 amid controversy over his handling of allegations of sexual abuse by the national team's longtime doctor, Larry Nassar.

The indictment alleges Mr. Penny ordered the removal of documents from the training facility, known as the Karolyi Ranch, related to the activities of Nassar, who was convicted last year on charges of sexual abuse and child pornography.

The indictment—which wasn't immediately available but which was summarized in a news release from the Walker County District Attorney's office—alleges that the removal of the documents was aimed at impairing the continuing investigation by Walker County and the Texas Rangers.

Penny was arrested Wednesday by U.S. Marshals in Tennessee, while on a family vacation, according to law-enforcement officials and people familiar with the matter.

A lawyer for Penny said he went on vacation without knowing he had been indicted in Texas. “He was arrested when a team of armored marshals suddenly arrived at a vacation cabin while he was sitting with his wife and three children,” said the lawyer, Edith Matthai, adding that Penny hadn’t attempted to avoid the charges. “Mr. Penny is confident that when all the facts are known the allegations against him will be disproven.”



According to the release, the records from the Karolyi Ranch were delivered to Mr. Penny at the USA Gymnastics headquarters in Indianapolis. The records haven’t been located or recovered, the release said.

Mr. Penny stepped down under pressure from his post at USA Gymnastics in 2017, in part due to his handling of the Nassar scandal, according to people familiar with the situation. He received a severance package of about \$1 million.

He had led USA Gymnastics since 2005, overseeing a period in which the team enjoyed Olympic glory, only to be engulfed last year by sexual-abuse allegations against Nassar, the team physician.

Questions about USA Gymnastics’ handling of abuse allegations began on the eve of the 2016 Rio Olympics and erupted throughout that fall after Nassar was arrested on federal child pornography and state sexual abuse charges.

Penny and USA Gymnastics have long contended that they reported the Nassar allegations to law-enforcement officials immediately.

Penny was first informed of national team gymnasts’ concerns about Nassar in June 2015. But the federation didn’t report the matter to law enforcement for at least five weeks, after conducting an internal investigation, and didn’t alert the U.S. Olympic Committee to the allegations until August of that year, The Wall Street Journal reported in 2017. The Federal Bureau of Investigation didn’t open a formal investigation into the matter until April 2016.

USA Gymnastics was named in many of the lawsuits against Nassar and it faces legal and congressional scrutiny for its handling of sexual-abuse claims against youth gymnastics coaches across the U.S. USA Gymnastics has said it is appalled by the abuse allegations and wasn’t aware of Nassar’s alleged conduct before the summer of 2015.

The Inspector General's office of the Justice Department is investigating how the FBI handled the abuse allegations and could bring criminal charges in the matter, the Journal has reported.

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