



OLYMPICS

USA Gymnastics a 'total failure,' according to investigation of famed Karolyi ranch

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Published 4:11 p.m. ET June 29, 2018 | Updated 10:17 p.m. ET June 29, 2018

Martha and Bela Karolyi were cleared of criminal wrongdoing by Texas law-enforcement officials, who instead blamed USA Gymnastics for a “total failure” to protect gymnasts from being sexually abused by Larry Nassar at the famed coaches' ranch.

In announcing new charges against the longtime USA Gymnastics physician Friday afternoon, Walker County assistant district attorney Stephanie Stroud said her office had also considered whether others “could or should be charged.” But the statute of limitations for failure to report, a misdemeanor, had already passed, Stroud said.

“We are bound by the law, but that in no way means there was no wrongdoing at the ranch or within the ranks of USAG,” Stroud said at a news conference. “It is our belief that there was a total failure by USAG to protect the athletes that were part of their program, and to take appropriate action once they were made aware of Dr. Nassar’s actions.”

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Olympic champions Simone Biles, Aly Raisman, McKayla Maroney, Gabby Douglas and Jordyn Wieber are among the more than 300 women who said Nassar abused them under the guise of medical treatment.

USA Gymnastics first became aware in June 2015 that gymnasts were uncomfortable with Nassar’s treatment but waited five weeks while it conducted its own investigation before reporting Nassar to the FBI. USA Gymnastics did not publicize the reason for Nassar’s departure nor tell Michigan State, where he also worked, saying it had been instructed not to by the FBI.

Nassar's abuse would not become public until September 2016, when Rachael Denhollander contacted *The Indianapolis Star*, a member of the USA TODAY Network.

"There were so many chances for something to be done that wasn't," said David Weeks, the Walker County district attorney.

In a statement, USA Gymnastics said it was "sorry that any athlete was harmed."

"USA Gymnastics supports and is fully cooperating with the investigations by the Texas Rangers, Congress and others, and we will continue do so," the statement added.

A month after Denhollander went public, Michigan officials alerted the Walker County sheriff's office to allegations of abuse at the ranch. Two cases were turned over to Michigan officials to be considered during Nassar's sentencing hearing.

But after the hearing, which including searing testimony by more than 150 women, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott asked the Texas Rangers to see if anyone else was culpable for Nassar's actions at the ranch.

Several gymnasts have sued the Karolyis, alleging they fostered a culture of fear and intimidation that allowed Nassar to thrive. Bela Karolyi was hired in late 1999 to be the first women's national team coordinator, and Martha replaced him in 2001 and served until after the Rio Olympics in 2016.

Monthly training camps were held at their ranch from 2000 until earlier this year. USA Gymnastics leased the property from the Karolyis and initially planned to buy it after Martha Karolyi retired, but backed out after it became known some of Nassar's abuse had occurred there.

Stroud said the Karolyis were interviewed at length, but officials found "no corroborated evidence of criminal conduct."

"Nassar did not work for them," Weeks said. "The people who had control over him failed. Simple as that."

The new charges against Nassar are six counts of sexual assault of a child, a second-degree felony. Also charged is Debbie Van Horn, a longtime trainer who gymnast Mattie Larson said was in the room when Nassar abused her. Van Horn, who worked for USA Gymnastics until January of this year, faces one count of sexual assault of a child.

Though Nassar will spend the rest of his life in prison after pleading guilty to federal child pornography charges and seven charges in Michigan of sexually assaulting girls, Weeks defended the decision to file the new charges.

“It’s the right thing to do,” he said. “Because these victims deserve to be heard. Because they deserve justice.”

The investigation into Nassar’s abuse at the ranch remains open, too. Weeks said his office has asked USA Gymnastics for records and documents, and is still waiting for those.

“If we get other information and we gain access to records and things,” Stroud said, “there may be other charges.”