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# Family suing swim groups over girl's sexual abuse

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Attorney Jonathan Little explains the lawsuit to reporters today. / Michelle Pemberton / The Star



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A lawyer representing a 14-year-old girl whose swim coach solicited her for sex is filing a lawsuit today against the sports organizations that employed him.

Attorney Jonathan Little also called on the Marion County prosecutor to file charges against adults who were told about abuse incidents, but did not report them to police.

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The lawsuit targets USA Swimming, Indiana Swimming and the Lawrence Township schools.

In addition to monetary damages for the young swimmer, the suit seeks the termination of top officials at USA and Indiana swimming



Christopher Wheat poses for a jail book-in photo in October 2009. / Provided by Indianapolis Metropolitan Police

"USA swimming fosters the culture that harbors pedophiles," Little told a news conference this morning.

USA Swimming and Indiana Swimming had two chances to stop the coach before he molested the girl, identified as "Jane Doe," Little said.

A Marion County judge declined Friday to shorten the prison sentence for the former Lawrence swim coach who admitted to sexual activity with the 14-year-old girl.

Christopher Wheat was sentenced in September 2010 to eight years in prison and two in community corrections programs after he pleaded guilty to two counts of sexual misconduct with a minor and one count of child solicitation. The victim was a swimmer on the Lawrence Swim Team, where he was head coach and executive director. He also was an assistant coach for Lawrence North High School.

The solicitation charge covered lewd text messages that Wheat had sent to the girl, who had been a Lawrence Swim Team member since she was 11. She told police she had several physical encounters with Wheat from Sept. 1 to Sept. 30, according to a probable cause affidavit, and the activity included fondling and kissing and deviate sexual conduct.

Wheat had asked Marion Superior Court Judge Carol Orbison to shorten his sentence because of progress he made during his first

year in prison. He's working toward completing college degrees, and his family members testified that he has now accepted blame for his crimes.

The victim and her parents testified about the emotional struggles

Timeline

Oct. 5, 2009: The executive director and head coach of the Lawrence Swim Team and assistant coach on the

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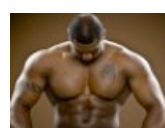
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they still face and encouraged Orbison to keep him behind bars.

"I rarely feel like a normal teenager," the victim told the judge.

The Indianapolis Star generally does not identify victims of sexual assault.

Orbison commended the victim's courage in testifying and declined to shorten Wheat's sentence. She said his plea agreement was "a gift" because he initially faced seven charges and several decades in prison.

Wheat's attorney, James Voyles Jr., said they would not ask for another sentence modification.

Today's announcement of the lawsuit will be available via teleconference from the Near-Northside law firm of Saeed & Little.

Shortly after the charges were filed in 2009, Lawrence North High School and the Lawrence Swim Team said they would bolster safeguards against misconduct by their coaching staffs, to prevent a repeat of molestation allegations that stunned the squads.

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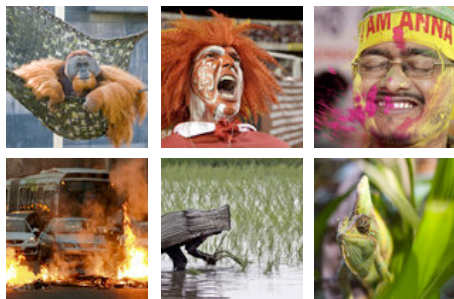
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