



MR. & MRS. REGINALD WILLIAMS

To: University of Arkansas Fort-Smith
From: Tyler Allen Williams; Former Student
Mr. & Mrs. Reginald Williams
RE: UAFS Discrimination
Date: 19-AUGUST-2019

Following our normal routine of talking with our children each night, my wife and I noticed something different in our oldest child; Tyler Allen Williams (21). We could tell from the disappointing look, the lowering of his chin and the sadness in his eyes that something was not sitting well with him. The son we raised to be a man of strong character and walk in high esteem, be well disciplined, courageous and resilient; had a defeated look in his eye as he sat next to our bedside and began to talk.

This change in his physical stature came on the heels of his first face-to-face meeting with the new Men's Basketball Coach at the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith (UAFS) Jim Boone. *"Mom...Dad, I have something to tell you. When I met Coach for the first time face-to-face, he made an offensive and racist statement directly to me. He looked at my hair and stated that he did not like my hair and would not recruit other players with hair like mine"*. This took a toll on our son as Boone's statement tore deep into his soul. It made him feel as though he had fallen back in time to the darkened days of African-American history that he read about in books, has seen in movies, television and discussed in our home. To witness and live this tragic setback was devastating to Tyler.

We reached out to the coaching staff and the Athletic Director of UAFS to set a meeting. On Friday, August 16, 2019 the meeting took place in the office of Coach Jim Boone. Attendees were Head Coach Jim Boone, Tyler Williams and Mr. & Mrs. Reginald Williams. This is where we were able to validate our son's story and see a true display of discrimination reveal itself in character right before our eyes. The blatant, demonstrative and boisterous head of discrimination began to rear and show through the words and actions of Coach Jim Boone.



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Tyler began the conversation by stating that he would like to talk about the first face-to-face meeting he had with Boone. As he recounted the conversation and refreshed Boone on what had taken place, Tyler stated to Boone that he was bothered by his statement that he did not like his hair and would not be recruiting any players with hair like Tyler. Boone stated, "**We make it clear here that once you get in here, you're not going to have your hair that way**". Since Tyler was a senior, he said he would not require him to cut his hair. Imagine yourself being told by your boss that one of your natural features he does not like. Specifically...your African American hair.

What Boone is referring to when he says "that way" refers to Tyler's natural dreadlocked hair. As an employee of UAFS, this statement by Boone is race-based discrimination, based on Tyler's natural hairstyle. Boone is attempting to enforce grooming policies that disproportionately affect people of color, particularly black people. This includes certain styles, such as braids, twists, cornrows and dreadlocks — or locs for short. As Tyler continued to express his disappointment with Boone's comment and reminds Boone again of his comment that he would not recruit players with hair like Tyler's, his response was "**I'm probably not**". Tyler asked Boone what does his hair have to do with his ability to play basketball. Boone states that his hair has nothing to do with his ability to play basketball but then continues to speak and say it is about hair. You can hear in the attached audio that Boone states, "**it is about hair**". Boone goes on to state, "**It's my program, this might be your team (Tyler), but it's my program and it's going to be ran my way**". My wife brought to his attention the recent ruling in California banning race-based discrimination against natural hair. To which Boone chuckled and replied, "**I don't have to deal with that, I don't live in California**". This demonstrates his blatant disregard to the discrimination occurring in the world.

As we continued to press the issue, Boone's demeanor becomes more prominent and his character under pressure began to show. We could see the anger in his eyes, the furrowing of his brow along with the clinching of his intertwined hands as he became entangled in his own words and began looking for a rescue outlet. Boone states "**In my 33 years of coaching, I have never had a guy who has had hair in any other way than I require**". And just like that, Boone dismissed Tyler from the UAFS Men's Basketball program 3 days before the start of school. His senior season at UAFS vanished right before our eyes, as our son



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stood up for himself and his hair. Tyler stated that he wanted to remain a player on the UAFS Men's Basketball team. Allow me to share with you what goes along with "this hair".

- **This hair...**has zero (0) disciplinary violations
- **This hair...**has zero (0) academic violations
- **This hair...**carries a 3.4 GPA representing UAFS
- **This hair...**is represented on the Presidential Honor Roll
- **This hair...**is represented on the Commissioners Honor Roll
- **This hair...**is a member of the NCAA Student Athlete Advisory Committee
- **This hair...**is a member of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society
- **This hair...**was a returning starter representing UAFS
- **This hair...**was the leading returning scorer representing UAFS
- **This hair...**lead the Heartland Conference in Free Throw (FT) percentage
- **This hair...**was chosen to represent UAFS for the NCAA Leadership Development Conference amongst all students on the UAFS campus
- **This hair...**was chosen as the sole Ambassador for "all student-athletes" in the Heartland Conference (9 schools that span across Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas) in Orlando, Florida
- **This hair...**is the kind of student-athlete colleges aspires to have on their campus and proudly represent their university.

Boone's dismissal of Tyler from the program alludes to the understanding that UAFS does not allow players with dreadlocks to have the slightest opportunity to become a player on the UAFS Men's Basketball team. As Boone states, **"we do not allow that hair in our program"**. That is an injustice to African-American athletes and a major, disappointing stain that UAFS must carry as long as the Men's Basketball team is under the coaching of Boone.

Every student-athlete has the right to wear natural hairstyles without fear of repercussions, exclusion, judgment or feelings of abandonment from a team sport. Tyler must be able to attend school and do his job both on and off the court, without feeling pressure to change his appearance based on someone else's "comfort level". The leadership at UAFS and the parent school, University of Arkansas, must consider the impact this form of racism can have on a student-athletes self-esteem. For many, being told-off, cast out or excluded for something so inconsequential can be confusing and upsetting. Tyler has always been a gifted



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student, but being dismissed just took the wind out of his sails. This indignity forced Tyler to choose whether to lose the opportunity to play his senior season at UAFS or lose something that's a part of his identity.

Coaches like Boone, who subscribe to the *"it's my way or the highway"* school of thought when it comes to student-athletes taking a stand for themselves, points toward the fact that someone of immature leadership and the inability to adapt to change is sitting in a seat of discomfort. The "my way or the highway" mentality demonstrates a deficiency in the ability to connect with others which makes one fall back on their own personal rules to govern a program. Styles such as dreadlocks, braids, cornrows and, of course, afros, can't be disentangled from black culture. Boone's action of policing black hair is a form of pervasive racism and bias. These actions have been played out in workplaces, it's played out in schools — not just in athletic competitions and settings — every single day all across America in ways that are subtle, and in ways overt. Never did we think this would happen to our son at the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith.

We cannot keep silent on this issue. The full audio of what transpired on Friday, August 16, 2019 is attached and will forever be in our records. For too long incidences like this and others have been swept under the rug and died a silent death. No more!! This story will be shared. We have been and will continue to utilize social and news media to have this story of prejudice and bias told all across the many outlets that exist. We are in contact with the governing EEOC, NAACP, NCAA and other organizations to assist us in bringing light to this horrific tragedy to a student-athletes athletic and academic journey. It's crazy that in 2019 that my son could not finish his education and athletic career at UAFS because of his natural hair.

Sincerely,
Tyler Allen Williams; Former UAFS Student
Mr. & Mrs. Reginald Williams