

## Lawyer Overhears Conversation About NCAA Probe of Hoops Star and Reveals Her Concerns

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By [Debra Cassens Weiss](#)

A Memphis lawyer decided to act when she overheard a conversation about an NCAA probe of a basketball player and became concerned that the case had been prejudged.

On a plane flying from Chicago to Memphis on Aug. 7, Florence Johnson Raines says she overheard a young man bragging that his girlfriend, an NCAA lawyer, was investigating Shabazz Muhammad, report the [Los Angeles Times](#), [WREG](#) and the [New York Times](#). The young man said his girlfriend "Abigail" was convinced Muhammad was "dirty" and he would never play this season.

The conversation occurred only eight days after the NCAA had asked for documents in the case and three months before the organization declared Muhammad ineligible.

Raines recounted the plane conversation in an email to a member of the NCAA infractions committee, but never heard back. Raines wrote that she was concerned about the lack of confidentiality and "the cavalier discussion of this young man's future being tossed about for everyone to hear."

Muhammad, a top recruit who plays for UCLA, was being investigated because a family friend paid for recruiting trips made by Muhammad to Duke and the University of North Carolina. The NCAA allows close friends to pay for such visits, but not agents and boosters.

After Muhammad was declared ineligible on Nov. 9, Raines confirmed she sent the email in an interview with the [Los Angeles Times](#). The day after the newspaper published a story, the NCAA announced Muhammad would be eligible after a three-game suspension (which he had already served) and a \$1,600 payment to charity.

An independent lawyer representing the NCAA told Raines that her initial email was "apparently overlooked," according to the Los Angeles Times account. The NCAA is investigating the conversation.

Raines practices labor and employment law at Johnson and Brown in Memphis. She told WREG she doesn't follow sports and initially thought Muhammad was a football player. Her colleagues set her straight.

A lawyer for Muhammad's family, [Bill Trosch](#), told WREG they were grateful that Raines decided to speak up. "It doesn't happen very often, that the right person with the right ethics is in the right place," he said.