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[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

Football coach, players charged with harassment

By Joshua C. Gillette

The Columbia Gay and Lesbian Alliance (CGLA) has demanded that Assistant Football Coach Thomas Gilmore issue a public apology to an employee of dining services who claims Gilmore and members of the football team subjected him to anti-homosexual harassment last week.

CGLA says if Gilmore does not issue an apology acceptable to Jame Mukherjee by November 1, they will demand he be fired.

However, Gilmore denies that he or any players harassed Mukherjee in any way.

The CGLA charges stem from a comment card Gilmore submitted in Johnson Dining Hall last week reading, in part, "he [Mukherjee] and another male were kissing behind the counter." Unsigned cards subsequently appeared in the box

reading, "Get the homo's [sic] out of the kitchen you are encouraging AIDS die!" and "get rid of the fags who serve during training table."

Mukherjee claims members of the football team wrote the latter two cards, and over two consecutive days last week "made cat calls and hooting at me—a blatant and disturbing form of harassment."

Several members of the football team contacted by Spectator refused to comment, referring reporters to Head Coach Larry McElreavy.

But, "I did not tell them not to speak with you," McElreavy said.

Last Wednesday night, October 19, Mukherjee, who is not a Columbia student, was serving sandwiches in Johnson Dining Hall during a time reserved for the varsity football team. While Mukherjee was behind the counter he spoke with another dining services employee, Matt Glomski, CC '89, and then kissed Glomski and another female friend goodbye, Mukherjee said.

"I looked up to the frowning face of Tom Gilmore, football coach, and was slightly amused to see his chagrin, made the sandwich and thought nothing more of the incident," Mukherjee said.

Later that evening, Gilmore complained to one of Mukherjee's supervisors that Mukherjee's long hair was not under a hat and he was not wearing cellophane gloves, as required by dining services rules and New York City health codes. The supervisor subsequently told Mukherjee to stop serving sandwiches.

According to a CGLA statement about the incident, Gilmore "spoke quite feverishly to members of the football team concerning the kiss" before speaking to the supervisor. Gilmore denied this.

After complaining to the supervisor, Gilmore left a comment card in the dining hall's suggestion box, stating, "Server's clothes dirty and ripped. Playing with mouth and hair and then handling the sandwiches with his hands. Then he and another male were kissing behind counter." Gilmore signed the card and wrote his telephone extension.

In a letter to Director of Athletics Al Paul, CGLA wrote, "His [Gilmore] written comment to Dining Services and his conversations with Mr. Mukherjee's Crew Chief and Manager

dwelled upon the fact that he had witnessed Mr. Mukherjee kissing 'another male.' Mr. Gilmore has not in any of his statements denounced the act of kissing per se, but rather seems to imply that it was the gender of the receiver of the kiss which made the action inappropriate."

Gilmore responded Monday night, "That is not true, that was not what my problem was with him. "He was playing with his hair, and he actually wiped his nose and then picked up the bread to make the sandwich. My complaint was with the health violation and the ways he was handling the food."

Gilmore said Mukherjee's actions caused the team members to lose their appetites.

"Fifteen people had to walk away without eating and I don't think that's right," he said.

"He [Mukherjee] is trying to make something and blow something out of proportion because maybe he was reprimanded for the way he was handling the food," Gilmore added. "Anything else he wants to make out of it is pure fabrication."

In a letter to the CGLA Tuesday in response to the charges, Gilmore wrote: "Mr. Mukherjee's actions relating to kissing another male directly behind the food counter has nothing whatsoever to do with being homophobic, it was just another example of actions that should not be taking place while serving food. This and this alone is the reason for my complaint. A person's sexual preference is not of my concern."

Manager of Johnson Dining Hall Charles Trimboli said, "I had to agree with Tom's [Gilmore] view that this is not good behavior to go on behind the line.

"He shouldn't be kissing a friend of his behind the line. I think Tom Gilmore thought it was homosexual, [but] it wasn't—that's just the way they greet each other."

On Thursday, after receiving Gilmore's comment card, Tromboli spoke with Gilmore and other coaches about the complaints. Tromboli said he felt the matter was settled the previous night, but that Gilmore refused to drop the issue.

"I'm led to believe he [Gilmore] escalated the situation, when it could have ended there," Trimboli said.

When Mukherjee arrived at work Thursday evening, during the team's special dining period, he was jeered by team members, he said.

Glomski said he saw some of the people in the dining hall point at Mukherjee, although he said he is not sure if they were football players.

"I watched them point to each other and point to Jame," Glomski said. "When Jame walks in, there's definitely the air of uneasiness the moment he walks in, when the football team is there."

team is there.

Lisa McFadden, CC '89, a dining services employee, said she was behind the serving counter Thursday night when Mukherjee arrived, and thus could not see the dining room. But, she said, "I noticed an increase in the noise level, and a lot of jeering and yelling when Jame walked in."

Gilmore denied that football players jeered at Mukherjee.

"That's totally false, a fabrication, to my knowledge," Gilmore said of the allegation. "I'm not going to go along with any kind of thing they're trying to make out of it.

"I think it's pretty ridiculous that the kid is filing action with the deans. No one was jeering him or anything," he added.

At approximately 8 p.m., Mukherjee said, he saw four football players—none of whom he could identify individually—stand by the comment table and fill out a card. He said he immediately went to retrieve the card, which lay on the table. It was the only card submitted that evening, he said.

The card, of which CGLA has released a photocopy, reads, "Get the homo's [sic] out of the kitchen you are encouraging AIDS die!"

Trimboli said he found another unsigned comment card in the box Friday morning which read, "Get rid of the fags who serve during training table."

That card was written Thursday evening, he said.

Gilmore questioned whether football players wrote the comment cards.

"Why do they assume it was a football player? There's no way they can say that it was a football player. Even last night, there were other students there. There could have been plenty of other people in that dining room.

"The card could have been put there earlier. Anyone could have did it. That kid Jame could have did that," Gilmore added. "It's just pure speculation on who wrote that card, even if it mentioned quote unquote training table."

But Mukherjee insists a player wrote the card.

"It absolutely had to be a football player who wrote it," Mukherjee said. "I couldn't single anyone out, [but] I serve them every day—it was definitely football players. There's no one else in there at 8:10."

The dining hall closes to the general public at 7 p.m., Trimboli said, and the football team is served alone. But students who are not football players sometimes stay past 7 p.m., he said.

The second unsigned card was probably submitted by a football player, Trimboli alleged, because on Thursday night the dining hall was occupied exclusively by the team.

"I would tend to believe that it was all football players."

I would tend to believe that it was all football players, he said. "I would guess it was a football player [who wrote the card]."

Trimboli said he believes Mukherjee's claim that the first unsigned card was also written by a football player.

"If he says he saw somebody, he knows the football players, so it could be a valid assessment," Trimboli said. Asked whether Mukherjee could have written the card himself, Trimboli said, "I don't think he would do that."

CGLA, in its letter to Paul, placed blame for the alleged harassment on Gilmore.

"The dignity and safety of Mr. Mukherjee is [Gilmore's] concern. A number of football players, who look up to Mr. Gilmore as a role model, interpreted his comments to be an attack on Mr. Mukherjee's sexual orientation and began to harass him. This harassment began the day after Mr. Gilmore witnessed and vociferously commented on the kiss."

The letter said there is a "definitive link between [Gilmore's] comments and the harassment that ensued."

"If the story's proved to be fallacious, we have no desire to sacrifice anybody that didn't do anything wrong," said CGLA Spokesperson Richard Schimpf, CC '89. "If he can prove to anyone's satisfaction that it wasn't a homophobic action, we don't want to get the guy."

Gilmore denounced the unsigned cards.

"The card is definitely not proper. That's not right, in my opinion," he said. "People's sexual preference is none of anyone else's business. I asked players on the team if any harassment went on, and they said 'no'. I don't believe anything like that is going on."

Columbia College Dean of Students Roger Lehecka yesterday sent a letter out to all Columbia students decrying "many recent instances on this campus of behavior ranging from intolerant to insensitive to malicious."

"In the last eight weeks," Lehecka wrote, "individuals...have written graffiti directed...against gay and lesbian students...others harassed a Dining Services employee because he is homosexual."

Mukherjee is heterosexual, according to Peggy Coe, BC '89, Mukherjee's girlfriend.

While Mukherjee could not be reached to respond to Lehecka's letter, Coe said: "I think Dean Lehecka did the same thing that the coach and the football players did, because he assumed that because a man was kissed by another man, he was homosexual, and that's jumping to conclusions."

"From the beginning, the issue was the whole perception that just because two men are kissing they are gay. Jame

doesn't have any problems with people thinking he's homosexual, but I really think Jame's personal life and his sexuality shouldn't come into this, because that's not the issue."

Responding to CGLA's initial complaints, Columbia College Assistant Dean of Students William Wiggins spoke to Paul on Monday.

"I was told that the football players would be made aware of it," Wiggins said.

Wiggins said he did not speak directly to Gilmore, but that "He [Gilmore] was there when I spoke to Paul."

While Wiggins said the writing on the cards constituted harassment, Columbia College deans will not speak to team members about harassment, but will allow the athletic department to handle the matter.

"This is how we're speaking to them: through their own," Wiggins said. "We normally do that—we contact the appropriate people. If we can single out the individual, they could be brought in. We don't know if everyone was involved."

Gilmore said, "We just reminded our kids to conduct ourselves properly, and that's all we had to do.

"If there were any kids who did something wrong, we have our own disciplinary actions, that are probably above and beyond what the deans do, but as far as what the deans want to do, I don't know," Gilmore said.

According to Paul, "When I got the call from Dean Wiggins, I did ask our coaches to mention to the team about the allegations—not substantiated—and did ask the coaches to remind the team of previous times that we always talk about."

Head Coach Larry McElreavy said he spoke with the players Tuesday after practice, and recalled the alleged racial incident involving football players in March 1987.

“I just said that all human beings should be subjected to sensitivity. I want all human beings treated with sensitivity,” he said.

McElreavy said the team “did not respond to me” about the alleged jeering, and that he did not ask them about it.

Responding to Lehecka’s statement that the Dining Service employee was harassed by someone, McElreavy said, “I don’t know what Mr. Lehecka’s sources are. If they [the players] are [those who harassed Mukherjee], then Lehecka has to deal with them—they are students.”

McElreavy said he would not respond to CGLA demands to institute special sensitivity training sessions for athletes until consulting with Paul.

McElreavy also said he supports Gilmore.

“I have implicit trust in my coach, and until it is proven otherwise, I’m satisfied with what he’s done,” McElreavy said.



COURTESY SPORTS INFORMATION

Tom Gilmore