

September 13, 2019

President Todd Diacon  
Kent State University  
Office of the President  
800 E Summit St, Kent, OH 44240

Dear President Diacon,

We have been asked to reach out to you on behalf of a large group of worried Kent State University stakeholders. All of us admired your September 12 letter to the Kent State University Community, your decision to initiate an investigation, and your insistence that “we can, and must, do better.”

We agree with you when you wrote the incident “does not reflect who we are as a university or a welcoming community.” Unfortunately, based on our combined experiences, we believe the incident does reflect what Kent State University’s Athletic Department has become during the last decade.

Our group includes multiple members of the Board of Directors of The Kent State University Foundation, members of the National Athletic Development Council, former student athletes and coaches including Kent State Varsity “K” Hall of Fame inductees, prominent community leaders and business owners, and former members of Kent State Athletics Senior Staff under athletic director Joel Nielsen.

We all share a deep concern about the Kent State University Athletic Department, and we are asking for the opportunity to meet with you for a short discussion to go over those concerns and how we can aid in the investigation by the Office of Compliance, Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action.

Saturday’s incident is a symptom of a much larger problem within the athletic department. Local and national media are aware of the greater problem and are in possession of documents confirming among other concerns:

- The climate and gender equity problems within the department.
- The fact that discrimination and retaliation against women and insensitivity towards women and minorities is an ongoing concern leading to a torrent of staff turnover and even the filing of a formal EEOC complaint by a former head coach.
- Studies showing only five of the NCAA’s 351 Division I athletic departments have a worse rating than Kent State with regard to women in coaching.
- Emails proving Nielsen was dishonest in an HR investigation concerning sexual harassment and participated in a coverup to protect a sexual predator who put the safety of student athletes and female staff at risk.

Beyond the gender equity issues and toxic climate within the halls of the M.A.C. Center, we are concerned about increasing alienation felt by donors, the community and local businesses. Longtime and potential donors are on record as saying they will not give to Kent State until Nielsen is no longer athletic director. Donations are down. Attendance is down. The relationship with the community is nonexistent. Even the performance of all but three of Kent State's athletic programs is down significantly during Nielsen's nine years when compared to the nine years prior to his arrival.

We question the return on investment from Nielsen's \$436,000 annual salary – compensation that is by far the highest in the Mid-American Conference and nearly twice the league average.

We are sympathetic to the fact that you inherited these problems. We ask for a meeting not because we want to make demands of you, but because we love Kent State University and are eager to promote problem solving that could end the damaged culture surrounding the Kent State University Athletic Department.

Is there a day and time that would fit in your schedule?

Kind regards,

Aileen Ahlers, BS '19

*MBA Graduate Assistant, Finance, Kent State University, 2019-20*

*Kent State Field Hockey Student Athlete, 2015-2018*

*2019 Female Academic SA Award*

*NFHCA Division I National Academic Squad, 2015-2018*

*Student Athlete Leadership Institute Member, 2016-2017*

Mike Beder, '00

*Kent State University Athletics Donor*

*Student Body President, 1999-2000*

*Owner of Tree City Coffee, Water Street Tavern, The Venice Cafe, Franklin Hotel Bar*

*Varsity "K" Hall of Fame Inductee, Honorary, 2013*

Jess Bechard, '02

*Kent State Baseball Student Athlete, All-MAC First Team Selection, 1998 and 1999.*

*Varsity "K" Hall of Fame Inductee, 2015*

David Carducci, MA '17

*Director of New Media, Kent State University Athletics, 2012-2018*

*Former Kent State Athletics Beat Reporter, The Record-Courier, 1994-2011*

Paige Culver, '19  
*Kent State Soccer Student Athlete, 2015-2018*  
*All-American, 2018*  
*USC Scholar All-America Athlete, 2017*  
*Professional Soccer player, Bari, Italy*

Kris Ewing, EdD  
*Kent state Field Hockey Student Athlete, 1979-1983*  
*Head Coach, Kent State Field Hockey, 1985-1994*  
*Kent State Young Alumni Achievement Award, 1996*  
*M.A.C. 50th Award Honoree, 1996*  
*Varsity "K" Hall of Fame Inductee, 2000*

Trevor Huffman, '03  
*Kent State Men's Basketball Student Athlete, 1998-2002*  
*Member of 2002 Elite Eight team*  
*Kent State Varsity "K" Hall of Fame Inductee, 2008*  
*Head coach, Okapi Aalstar, Belgian Professional Basketball League*

Dr. Janet Kittell  
*Deputy Director of Athletics/Senior Woman Administrator, Kent State University, 2012-2018*

Lyndsey Maurer  
*Director of Athletic Communications, Kent State University, 2013-2016*

Stephen M. Milkovich, '93  
*Board of Directors, Kent State University Foundation*  
*Co-owner and VP of Operations, Construction Mechanics Inc.*  
*Student Body President, 1992-93*

Bob Milliken, '83  
*Chairperson, National Athletic Development Council*  
*Varsity "K" Hall of Fame, Co-Person of the Year, 2008*  
*Kent State University Athletics donor*  
*Former Ohio State Trooper*

Sheila Morrigan  
*Former Assistant Director of Athletic Communications, Kent State University, 2009-2013*

Mandi Morrow-Unruh, BS '12, MS '15  
*Kent State Women's Golf Student Athlete, 2012-2015*  
*Assistant Women's Golf Coach, University of Michigan*

Mike Morrow

*Kent State Men's Golf Student Athlete, 1971-1975*

*All-American, 1973*

*Varsity "K" Hall of Fame Inductee, 1987*

*Head Women's Golf Coach, Kent State University, 1998-2012*

*MAC Champions, 1998-2012*

*MAC Coach of the Year, 1999-2003, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2012*

*Golfweek National Coach of the Year, 2001*

Mollie Radzinski, BS '09, MS '17

*Assistant Director of Athletic Communications, Kent State University, 2012-2017*

*Interim Director of Athletic Communications, Kent State University, 2016*

*Assistant Athletic Director, Athletics Communications, University of Cincinnati*

Heather Schnepf

*Assistant Field Hockey Coach, Kent State University, 2010-2019*

Buzz Starner, '67

*Executive Board, Kent State University Foundation*

*President and Owner (retired), Starner Sales and Marketing*

*Kent State University Athletics Donor*

*NADC, former member*

Madison Thompson, '17

*Kent State Field Hockey Student Athlete, Captain, 2015-2016*

*Field Hockey Canada, member of indoor hockey program*

Tom Ward, '91

*Kent State Gymnastics Student Athlete, Team Captain 1991*

*Kent State Gymnastics, Assistant Coach 2008-2011*

*National Assistant Coach of the Year, 2011*

*Owner of Great Lakes Gymnastics, Avon Lake, Ohio*

Courtney Weise, BS '19

*Kent State Field Hockey Student Athlete, 2015-2018*

*Field Hockey Captain, 2018*

*Student Athlete Advisory Committee, 2016-2019; Executive Board Member, 2018-2019*

*Student Athlete Leadership Institute Member, 2016-2017*