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Student athletes defend university's program

By **MARCIA MARTINEZ**
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Saying she's satisfied with how the University of Illinois at Springfield administration handled a sexual harassment incident involving her, Alexandra Kirschbaum stood up for the athletic department and chancellor during a meeting of the Campus Senate on Friday.

Kirschbaum, a former cheerleader who is now a student worker in the athletic office, praised the administration for the actions it took in November.

"I don't like talking about it much," said Kirschbaum after the meeting.

"It's in the past. All I can say is that it was an incident between some basketball players and cheerleaders, and something bad happened. It was taken care of swiftly and right away. The athletic director (Rodger Jehlicka), chancellor (Richard Ringeisen) and the vice chancellor at the time, Chris Miller, rescued us right away. Rodger went to counseling with us. We tried to figure out the best solutions to finish out the year. The basketball player was removed from the team immediately." She didn't give the player's name.

The incident involving Kirschbaum was raised during a Campus Senate meeting where the recent resignations of three coaches was discussed. The Senate on Friday ordered an independent investigation of the UIS athletic department.

Joe Fisher resigned as head softball and volleyball coach, and Roy Gilmore resigned as head women's basketball coach and assistant softball coach after the softball team returned from a trip to Florida last month. Men's and women's golf coach Jay Davis resigned March 26 after being placed on administrative leave with pay three weeks earlier.

Kirschbaum said she's spoken to players on the golf and softball teams.

"The golf girl and the softball girls who were involved were all taken out of the situation immediately and went for counseling," Kirschbaum said. "They were given the idea, 'If you need anything, we're here for you.'"

Erika Snyder, a four-year basketball player from Pittsfield and member of the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, also defended the athletic department during the meeting. Her younger sister, Emmarie Snyder, plays softball for UIS.

Erika Snyder said she's opposed to an independent investigation and feels it isn't needed.

"No one ever bothered to ask us how we felt about the situation or contact the girls who went through problems and ask them how the situation was dealt with," she said. "They're all very happy with the way the circumstances were dealt with. Faculty members that were making decisions and people who were definite advocates for this (investigation) resolution didn't bother to reach out."

Snyder refused to discuss what she knows about what occurred during the softball team's trip. Kirschbaum also declined to share details, other than to say that alcohol did not play a "huge role" in what took place among the softball coaches and players. Snyder said the players involved also don't want to talk about what happened.

"The athletes don't want to discuss it because they don't want to relive that," Snyder said. "They don't want to share the gory details. I've heard from people who were involved in the situation say, 'It's embarrassing. I don't want to discuss it. I want this to pass.'"

"It's being dealt with. They're going to counseling sessions. They're dealing with it. They feel like it's been dealt with positively, and they're ready to move on."

UIS has adopted a new policy since the three coaches resigned.

Now, a female administrator will accompany any women's sports team coached by a male to off-campus competitions, according to UIS assistant director of athletics for communications and sports information director Scott Reed.

Marcia Martinez can be reached at 788-1547.

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