

Search firm disputes accusation from Minnesota regarding Norwood Teague

Parker Executive Search, the well-known firm that helped place Norwood Teague as Minnesota's athletics director in April 2012, disputes a suggestion by school president Eric Kaler that it didn't do due diligence during the search process.

Teague resigned on Aug. 7 after admitting that he sexually harassed two female university employees. Other women, including a Minneapolis *Star Tribune* reporter who covered the Gophers' men's basketball team, have subsequently come forward with harassment claims.

In a letter delivered to Kaler on Friday, a copy of which was obtained by USA TODAY Sports, the firm's attorney **Richard Robbins** reiterated that Parker found no reported instances of sexual harassment in his previous job at VCU.

In an interview last week with Minnesota Public Radio News, Kaler suggested that a gender discrimination claim filed against Teague at VCU by a former women's basketball coach should have been caught in the background search. He also left open the possibility of seeking legal recourse against Parker, which was paid \$90,000 for the search plus expenses.

"It's very disappointing to be let down in this way," Kaler told the station. "In the search process we relied on a firm that claimed they did their due diligence and missed this."

In the letter, however, Parker contends that the complaint was filed in May 2012 — after he was already hired at Minnesota — and was not related to sexual harassment but rather an allegation that the coach was not treated fairly under Title IX guidelines.

VCU settled the claim in July 2012, paying former women's basketball coach Beth Cunningham \$125,000. A former assistant on her staff told the Richmond *Times-Dispatch* earlier this month that the issues involved in the complaint had "nothing to do with anything pertaining to the incidents that occurred at Minnesota."

Because of the nature of that complaint, it wouldn't have been available in public records searches Parker would do as part of normal background checks. Parker claims it searched for lawsuits against Teague but found no records. Teague also did not disclose any internal complaints against him, which the firm asks for in writing for every candidate.

"VCU's complaint process is highly confidential," the letter says. "If there was an EEOC charge, that would have been confidential, nonpublic information as well, pursuant to federal law ... Parker Executive Search cannot be faulted for not learning more about a complaint filed internally and confidentially within VCU, or otherwise filed in a confidential context."

In the letter, Robbins asserts that Parker found no reason to suspect that Teague would engage in sexual harassment and that the firm's role in the hiring process has been misrepresented in the media.

One person in the industry who has been involved in numerous athletics director searches with a different firm told USA TODAY Sports that finding out information about a candidate beyond public searches and disclosure forms can be tricky while trying to maintain confidentiality. The person, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not involved in the search, said Parker did its due diligence.

The letter to Kaler says that Parker, which has facilitated two football and one basketball coaching search for Minnesota in recent years, would like to continue its relationship with the university.

"Neither Parker Executive Search nor the University had any reason to believe that Mr. Teague would engage in the appalling and unacceptable conduct of which he is accused," Robbins wrote. "Unfortunately, the subsequent comments attributed to (Kaler), and some of the conclusions apparently drawn by the media based on those comments, did not accurately reflect the role of Parker Executive Search. This has the potential of causing significant harm to the business and reputation of Parker Executive Search."