

Former Penn State football player says coach James Franklin told him not to report fight to police

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Penn State football coach James Franklin told a player not to talk to police following a physical fight with a teammate, according to allegations contained in a university report obtained by ESPN. Joe Robbins/Getty Images

[Penn State](#) football coach James Franklin told a player not to talk to police following a fight with a star linebacker in a 2018 incident that involved punching, choking and a knife being pulled, according to allegations contained in a university report obtained by ESPN.

The accusation by now-former Nittany Lions defensive back Isaiah Humphries is contained in a draft report that was part of a 2019 Title IX inquiry into sexual assault allegations in the Penn State locker room. The document sheds new light on the allegations that became public when Humphries [sued the school](#) early this year. The report, which does not include conclusions by investigators, contains interviews with dozens of football players, coaches and staff.

Humphries told investigators that, after his fight with linebacker Micah Parsons in March 2018, he met with Franklin in the coach's car outside the Lasch football building, according to the report. The investigator wrote: "Mr. Humphries added that Coach Franklin came and said, 'Don't talk to the police because Micah is his start [sic] player and makes money, so if he gets in trouble, he's gone,' meaning Mr. Humphries would be gone."

In a statement to ESPN, a university spokesperson said "Franklin has made it clear that he did not instruct Mr. Humphries to avoid contacting authorities."

"We believe the claims relating to Coach Franklin have no merit, and we will continue to defend him vigorously," the statement said.

Humphries, who transferred to [Cal](#) last year, has alleged sexual harassment by Parsons, defensive tackle Damion Barber and defensive lineman [Yetur Gross-Matos](#), the report shows. Humphries repeated those allegations in a January lawsuit that names Barber, Franklin and the school as defendants.

The school's document includes denials of the allegations from Barber and Gross-Matos. The document states that Parsons reviewed the draft of the report in August 2019. He did not respond to ESPN's request for comment.

Humphries told school investigators that Barber and Parsons threatened him, telling him they were "making me a b---- because this is prison" and that Barber said, "I'm gonna Sandusky you," referring to former Penn State coach Jerry Sandusky. He also said they would try to place genitalia close to players' faces and simulate sex acts and attempt to touch him in the shower, according to the report. He said the three players would wrestle him to the ground while clad only in their towels.

One player interviewed in the report told investigators that Barber, while naked, overpowered a teammate smaller than him and simulated sex acts, targeting him almost daily. The player said he didn't see Barber do that to Humphries and, in his statement, questioned Humphries' character, saying he lies for no reason, the investigator wrote in the report. The teammate who was said to have been targeted also spoke to investigators and said he was wrestled to the ground by Barber but that they were both "always fully clothed" and no one took it seriously.

Another player said Barber would dance around in the locker room naked, chase guys and give them hugs while he was naked or in tub shorts, the investigator wrote in the report. He also said he saw Barber wrestle and simulate a sex act with a teammate. On one occasion, that player said, Barber mimicked masturbation, the investigator wrote. Humphries described similar incidents. The player did not say whether he ever saw Humphries targeted by Barber and said he wasn't aware of any issues involving Humphries and other teammates.

Those two players who described Barber's behavior to investigators said they did not see Gross-Matos or Parsons touch teammates inappropriately, according to the draft report.

In August 2019, according to the report, a person described as "unidentified" delivered several pages of documents to Penn State's Office of Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response. In them, 68 Nittany Lions players signed their names to a statement that read, in part: "We have not witnessed anyone sexually assaulted or assaulted in anyway [sic] in our locker room."

Many of the players interviewed in the draft report obtained by ESPN either said they didn't see or denied there had been any nonconsensual touching within the locker room. Many of those same players said if there was any wrestling, it was playful and consensual and not meant to demean.

Barber was suspended from playing in Penn State's 2019 season opener for a violation of team rules. Franklin at the time did not provide a more specific reason. The school has acknowledged in court filings, without naming Barber, that its Office of Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response ultimately "imposed discipline" on one student-athlete "but made no findings of misconduct on the part of any other person."

In a statement to ESPN, Penn State said the school investigated Humphries' allegations but declined to comment on the results of that investigation, citing privacy concerns and the ongoing litigation.

Barber, who has since transferred, did not respond to a request for comment from ESPN. Parsons, who in early August announced that he would [opt out](#) of the 2020 season and enter the 2021 NFL draft as an underclassman, also did not respond to a request for comment. Nor did Gross-Matos, who is in his rookie season with the [Carolina Panthers](#) after being drafted in the second round.

[Jesse Luketa](#), a junior linebacker on the Nittany Lions' roster, one of four players named in Humphries' lawsuit, also spoke with school investigators, according to the report obtained by ESPN. Luketa said he and Humphries did not get along and had verbal confrontations but declined to go into specifics, according to the report. He said he never had any physical contact with Humphries. A school investigator noted that Luketa "acted shocked" when asked if he had ever witnessed any "unwanted wrestling, dry humping or verbal sexual statements" in the locker room and "was adamant that he never saw or heard anything" sexual or harassing in nature, the investigator wrote.

Luketa didn't respond to a request for comment, and the school declined to make him available for an interview.

Last week, Penn State and Franklin filed a motion to dismiss Humphries' claims against them, arguing, in part, that Humphries failed to establish negligence. They also argue that Humphries alleges he was harassed because of his lack of

seniority on the team, not because of his gender, and therefore fails to establish his claims under Title IX, the federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in education.

Humphries' claim that Franklin discouraged him from reporting his fight to police came in response to a question about training on Title IX practices. Humphries told a school investigator that players received the training about once per week but described an atmosphere in which Franklin discouraged players from sharing information about alleged incidents to the media or outside the team. He said Franklin would "remind people not to say anything," the investigator wrote.

Other players, when asked whether Franklin told them not to discuss team issues, either denied Franklin said that or told school investigators they interpreted it to mean don't talk to the media, according to the report. Some players said Franklin encouraged them to be honest and open if questioned by investigators.

Humphries said his 2018 fight with Parsons began when Parsons poured water on him while he was asleep in the academic center and that some of the water got on his laptop and phone, according to the report. Humphries said he then poured Gatorade on Parsons, who then punched him.

Humphries told a school investigator that Parsons was choking him and wouldn't stop, so Humphries pulled out a pocket knife, which he said led Parsons to stop choking him and put an end to the fight, according to the report.

Following the fight, Humphries' father, former Penn State player Leonard Humphries, had an animated conversation with Franklin, he told ESPN.

"[Franklin is] on the phone saying, 'Where did [Isaiah] get a f---ing knife? I can't control the f---ing situation. Now the police are going to get involved,'" Leonard Humphries said Franklin told him.

Two days after the fight, in a meeting inside Franklin's office attended by two assistant coaches, Isaiah Humphries said Franklin told him "you should have just gotten your ass beat and not pulled a knife," according to the amended complaint Humphries filed in October.

Humphries told ESPN he never spoke with police about his fight with Parsons. But Penn State placed Parsons on conduct probation from May 21, 2018, through Dec. 21, 2018, in part for his role in the fight, according to the complaint.

In April 2019, Penn State University Police received a report of sexual harassment and inappropriate touching allegations, according to a search warrant obtained by ESPN.

Centre County District Attorney Bernie Cantorna told ESPN that the investigation, to date, "could not substantiate the serious allegations of sexual assault," but that case remains open. He said "a matter like this doesn't get closed" and encouraged anyone with additional information to come forward.

Cantorna said it was only after police and his office began investigating the allegations of sexual assault within the football program that they became aware of the March 2018 fight between Humphries and Parsons.

"My office did not receive a police report at the time of that alleged incident," Cantorna said.

Humphries told ESPN he first clashed with Parsons shortly after he arrived at Penn State in January 2018.

He said he became an even more frequent target of hazing within the football complex after fighting Parsons. He told investigators the assaults and sexual touching at times reduced him and other freshman players to tears.

"It takes a toll on you, because they had dominance over you," Humphries told the school investigator, adding: "Being at Penn State was hell. ... This is criminal. It's made to desensitize you."

Leonard Humphries said at first he was "ecstatic" when his son, a safety out of Rowlett, Texas, just outside Dallas, turned down offers from about 30 schools to commit to the Nittany Lions, where Leonard had played safety and cornerback from 1988 to 1992 under former coach Joe Paterno.

But from the spring to summer of 2018, he said, he received increasingly desperate calls from his son. "I dread walking into the locker room because I don't know what these people are going to do to me," Leonard said Isaiah told him. Leonard Humphries said he was "livid, pissed" and "in shock" when his son told him what was happening within the locker room.

Leonard Humphries said he had multiple conversations with five Penn State coaches, including Franklin, about the locker room behavior, although he was not aware of the full extent of his son's allegations.

"I said, 'Really? This stuff is happening in the same locker room where the Jerry Sandusky stuff happened? Are you kidding me?'" Leonard Humphries said he told members of Penn State's coaching staff.

"They were trying to make it seem like Isaiah was the problem," Leonard Humphries told ESPN, adding that Franklin in particular "was trying to manipulate the whole process of contacting the people involved and sweeping it under the rug."

Isaiah Humphries told ESPN his experience at Penn State left him so despondent that at one point he contemplated suicide.

"He started losing his hair at 19. I mean, who loses their hair at 19?" Leonard Humphries said, when describing the impact on his son. "He was depressed. He was withdrawn. He lost 20 pounds."



Isaiah Humphries, left, and his dad, Leonard, who played safety and cornerback for Penn State football from 1988 to 1992. Leonard Humphries

The draft report of the school investigation does not include an interview with Franklin but does include the details of interviews with four other coaches. In its statement to ESPN, the school said investigators did interview Franklin while

investigating the allegations of sexual assault within the football program, but the school declined to release a copy of that interview. Franklin and others named in the report were not made available for comment.

Dwight Galt IV, who served as the team's associate director of strength from January 2012 to January 2019 before leaving for a position at Old Dominion, told investigators he had never heard of players placing their genitals on other teammates but that he had heard of players playfully wrestling, according to the report.

"[Eighteen to 20]-year-olds are going to be boys," Galt told the investigator.

School investigators also interviewed Galt's father, Dwight Galt III, the Nittany Lions' assistant athletics director of performance enhancement. He told them he'd "never heard anything sexual" with respect to the allegations.

Galt III said players wrestled "all the time," but that it was "good-natured" and that a broken bench seat, TV and a hole in the locker room wall were likely the result of that roughhousing.

He said he was aware of the fight between Isaiah Humphries and Parsons and told a school investigator he had acted as Humphries' advocate when the incident was referred to Penn State's Office of Student Conduct, according to the report.

Barber reviewed the first draft of the report in August 2019 and provided a statement to investigators in response. "I did not sexually assault anyone in the locker room or anywhere else," he said.

In August 2019, Gross-Matos took a polygraph test requested by his lawyer and administered by an independent examiner to rebut allegations that he had unwanted sexual contact with Humphries inside the locker room, according to an attachment included in the report. Gross-Matos denied any type of sexual conduct with Humphries, and the polygraph examiner noted that there was "No Deception Indicated."

In June 2020, Barber entered the transfer portal; he is now a senior defensive tackle with Austin Peay.

In March, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights announced that it was requiring Penn State to adopt "major changes" in the way the school responded to "complaints of sexual abuse."

The federal report came as part of a review of how Penn State investigated complaints of sexual assault and harassment in the wake of the Sandusky scandal. The report noted that the Office for Civil Rights requested and, in January, was provided documents relating to Isaiah Humphries' complaint but that the federal review of that case was ongoing at the time of the March announcement.

ESPN researcher John Mastroberardino and reporter Dan Murphy contributed to this report.