Men's Lacrosse Team at Duke U. Forfeits Games Following Accusations of Rape at Party

By BURTON BOLLAG

Duke University announced on Saturday that its men's lacrosse team would forfeit two games following allegations by a woman who said she had been raped at an off-campus party the team held.

Durham, N.C., police officers are investigating the accusations made by the woman, who was at the party as a professional dancer and who is thought to be a student at another North Carolina university. They have taken DNA samples from 46 team members.

On Saturday, Duke's president, Richard H. Brodhead, issued a written statement urging all concerned to cooperate fully with the police.

He stated there were "very different versions of the central events," but added that if the accusations were proved correct, they would "warrant very serious penalties."

"Physical coercion and sexual assault are unacceptable in any setting," the president wrote.

The statement indicated that the university would wait for the police to finish their initial investigation before deciding on any further action. But Mr. Brodhead added that he fully backed the decision of Duke's director of athletics, Joseph L. Alleva, to forfeit the two matches -- one that would have been held on Saturday against Georgetown University, and one scheduled for Tuesday against Mount St. Mary's University.

The decision to forfeit the games was made because of events at the party that are not disputed by team members: that they hired private dancers to perform, and that underage team members were drinking alcohol.

Meanwhile, students and community members have held rallies in front of the house where the party was held.

About 100 people gathered there on Saturday in protest against the alleged assault, according to news reports, and another rally was held on Sunday.

The house, near Duke's campus, in Durham, was rented by another rally was held on Sunday.

The woman, who was one of two dancers who were hired to perform at the party, told the police that she had been sexually assaulted there during the early hours of March 14.

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He emphasized the seriousness of the accusations: first-degree rape, kidnapping, assault by strangulation and robbery.

A Duke official said that the police had asked 46 of the team's 47 members to provide DNA samples, and that all had complied. The official said the police did not ask the team's only black member for a sample because the alleged victim said the three men who assaulted her were white.

Until now, college lacrosse has generally not been caught up in accusations of misbehavior by team members. Members of college lacrosse teams have the highest rate of graduation of all collegiate sports teams.

Background articles from The Chronicle:

- Punishing Personal Fouls (1/13/2006)
- When Athletes Are Accused (4/1/2002)
- Colleges Use Peer Pressure to Encourage Healthy Behavior (7/28/2000)
- Colleges Seek Tactics to Prevent Criminal Conduct by Athletes (11/10/1995)
- Study Examines Male Athletes' Role in Assaults (12/7/1994)
- Rape-Prevention Programs for Male Athletes (2/10/1993)

Opinion: