

your life

“I refused to cheer for my attacker!”

After being assaulted by the star of her high school's basketball team, Hillaire took a stand—and was hurt all over again.

AS TOLD TO Jane Bianchi

MAIN PHOTO: JILL HUNTER; FASHION STYLIST: SUMMAR SALAH; PAGE PARKES; MODELS, HAIR AND MAKEUP: CAROL WAGENER FOR CAROLWAGENER.COM; UNION: ELISABETH GAREN; CHEERSQUAD PHOTO: GERRY L. DICKER/THE SILSBEE (TX) BEE; HEADLINE: ABC NEWS, OCTOBER 27, 2010.

High School Rape Victim Spends Two Years in Court Fighting Ouster From Squad

When Rakheem stepped to the foul line, I was shaking. Standing in my cheerleading uniform on the sideline of my Texas high school gym, I had no problem rooting for my basketball team—but I had a big problem rooting for him. Three months earlier at a house party, Rakheem had attacked me and forced me to have sex with him. He was arrested two days later and was sent to a different school temporarily. Now he was back, and my coach expected me to wave my arms in the air and chant, “2, 4, 6, 8, 10, come on Rakheem, put it in!”? No way.

PARTY NIGHTMARE

It all started one Saturday night in October of my junior year, I went to a party at my classmate Jacob's house. About 20 school friends were there, so it felt like a safe place where I could let loose. I started taking shots and drinking beer.

Around 2:30 A.M., I was alone in a hallway when three huge guys pushed me into a game room. The door slammed behind me. They were all athletes from school: Rakheem and two other guys. I'd never had much contact with them, but I always thought they were nice. I didn't understand why they were being so aggressive.

Then suddenly one of Rakheem's friends grabbed me and pushed me down on the pool table. They were all strong—I couldn't fight back. Rakheem pulled me onto the floor as I was kicking and screaming and forced me to have sex with him. I was shocked by the horror of what was going on. I screamed, “Stop! Get off me!” but he wouldn't listen. Never in my life have I felt so terrified and helpless. Jacob heard me yelling and broke down the door. The three guys ran away, leaving me curled up in the fetal position, sobbing.

ROAD TO RECOVERY

The police came screeching up to the party. I gave a statement and then went to a medical clinic to complete a rape kit. I felt so scared and overwhelmed. I

was still shaking. That night, I had the worst nightmares—I slept in the same bed as my parents all weekend.

But I went back to school the Monday after the attack. I wanted Rakheem to know that I was willing to confront him.

But the crazy part was, dealing with other students was the real issue. The entire school had heard what happened, and some classmates called me a liar and a slut. Once a guy in my class even said, “You just didn't want your dad to know you slept with a black guy.” I tried to keep my head high in school, but I cried when I got home because the comments were so hurtful.

NO BACKING DOWN

After a few months, Rakheem was allowed back in school and on the basketball team, because he hadn't yet been officially charged with the attack. During the first game Rakheem played, I crossed my arms instead of cheering when he came to the foul line. (I didn't plan to do this ahead of time, but I was so angry that it felt right.) At the next game a couple of weeks later, I sat next to my coach while the rest of the squad cheered for Rakheem. My coach wouldn't look at me or talk to me, even though I assumed she had heard what happened. Later during the game, she pulled me aside and said, “Cheer for everybody or you're off the team.” I refused to cheer for Rakheem, so she said, “Get your stuff.”

I couldn't believe how insensitive she was! I stormed out of the gym and was approached by my coach, along with my principal, superintendent, and assistant superintendent, who all agreed with my coach's decision. I burst into tears. They said I was being “insubordinate” by not cheering when I was supposed to. I felt so incredibly hurt and insulted.

Ultimately, Rakheem was charged with sexual assault, but he pleaded guilty to a lesser charge—he says he

kicked off the team
When Hillaire wouldn't root for her attacker, her school booted her from the cheer squad. Now she's fighting back.



didn't rape me. He got two years of probation, a \$2,500 fine, 150 hours of community service, and was ordered to take an anger management course. He got off easy, but overall, I feel relieved that he was punished at least a little bit.

My family and I are still furious about the way my school treated me, so we sued the school for kicking me off the team. But a federal court said that as a cheerleader, I was a “mouthpiece” for the school—not for myself. Apparently, I'm not allowed to share my own opinions at school. I still feel like I shouldn't be forced to cheer for anyone, so I'm asking the Supreme Court to consider my case. Being attacked was a horrendous experience, but being disrespected by my school was an extra slap in the face. I will keep fighting for my rights—no matter what. 17

standing up against rape



Before starring in the classic cheerleading film *Bring It On*, actress Gabrielle Union was raped at age 19 at her job at a shoe store. She now works with RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network). To get help, call RAINN at 800-656-HOPE or visit rainn.org.

“If you've been sexually abused, you're not alone. And there is someone who can help.”
—Gabrielle