Coach fired for racial slurs gets players' backing

DETROIT (AP) — A group of black Central Michigan basketball players said Tuesday they have joined a lawsuit filed by their former coach, who was fired for using a racial slur in front of the team.

The university fired Keith Dambrot last week for telling his players "I wish we had more niggers on this team" after they lost a game last season. He also said 'Mac's a nigger" in reference to assistant coach Derrick McDowell.

Dambrot, who is white, says he had an understanding with his team about the word, which the team used to connote toughness and tenacity.

Dambrot filed a lawsuit Monday in U.S. District Court in Bay City alleging the school violated his right to free speech. He is seeking damages, reinstatement as coach and a preliminary injunction to reverse the hiring of new coach

Leonard Drake at the school in Mount

Freshman guard Keith Gilmore said he and eight other players decided to join the suit because they felt Dambrot had been treated unfairly.

All the people who said he should be fired, they weren't there when he said it. They don't understand the situation.' Gilmore, 19, said Tuesday. "It was a bad choice of words, but you had to be there to understand it."

Gilmore said neither he nor any of the other players who were there were offended by Dambrot's remarks.

The university originally suspended Dambrot without pay for four days, then fired him after a hostile public reaction. School spokeswoman Rae Goldsmith said Dambrot was fired because the program couldn't "survive under his leadership."

Goldsmith said Tuesday the students may have joined the suit because they were worried about losing playing time or their scholarships under a new coach.

Gilmore denied the players were wor-ried about themselves. "We did it out of concern for our coach and what we think is right," he said.

James Schuster, Dambrot's lawyer, said the university has harmed the players as well as his client.

'A new coach may not elect to retain them on the team," Schuster said. "They are also put in fear of being able to freely speak, and they've been associated with coach Dambrot and they fear they might get what he got, punishment for their

The other players who joined the suit are: LaKeith Boyd, Leonard Bush, Marcus Culbreth, DeShanti Foreman, Tyrone 'All the people who said he should be fired, they weren't there when he said it. They don't understand the situation.'

> - Keith Gilmore, freshman guard

Hicks, Amere May, Torrey Mills and Mario Patterson.

A hearing on the motion to prevent the school from hiring a new coach was scheduled for April 30 before Judge Robert Cleland.

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ГФВ

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