

USM and the NCAA

It has been only a few months since [the USM community learned](#) that its head women's basketball coach, Joye Lee-McNelis, violated a number of NCAA regulations and was forced to sit out a game during the 2010-11 season. Sitting out that game – a 22-point defeat at the hands of Louisiana Tech University in early Jan-2011 – was punishment for Lee-McNelis' (1) requirement that a non-qualifying player participate in practice, (2) requirement that a player participate before completing mandated medical testing, and (3) decision to allow a non-qualifying player to participate in required physical activities. More recently, via Patrick Magee's [17-July-2011 report](#) for *The Hattiesburg American*, that same USM community learned of shenanigans that appear to have occurred with the USM men's tennis program. According to Magee, USM “. . . faces a lawsuit from a former tennis player that includes allegations of NCAA rules violations committed by former tennis coach Teddy Viator.” As Magee adds, the lawsuit has been filed on behalf of Patricio Alvarado, and it names USM, the NCAA, and Viator.

Alvarado alleges, in his July-2011 complaint with the Forrest County Circuit Court, that he faced financial hardship after his eligibility was deemed to be exhausted after the 2009-10 season. Alvarado also alleges that Viator paid one of Alvarado's teammates to write a history paper for Alvarado so that he could remain eligible in 2010-11. The complaint originated from actions back in May-2010, when three USM men's tennis players had their scholarships taken away by USM. The three then approached USM officials with the story about Alvarado, only to have Alvarado ruled ineligible and Viator fired. According to documents filed in FCCC, the student who wrote the paper – one that earned Alvarado a B in a history course – was paid \$150 by Viator. Alvarado also alleges that he was approached by another USM official and asked to deny the facts of the story to NCAA investigators, who were also looking into matters at USM. As Magee points out, the three players who had their scholarships revoked regained those scholarships as a result of the NCAA investigation. The NCAA's investigation also resulted in reinstatement of Alvarado's scholarship, though his tennis eligibility ended with the 2010-11 season, and he was left without financial aid during that same academic year. Now, Alvarado is facing expiration of his student visa, and he no longer has the financial wherewithal to pay for his college education at USM. Hence, Alvarado's recent legal filing against USM with the FCCC.

Sources tell USMNEWS.net that it seems clear that the NCAA found fault with USM's handling of its men's tennis program, and subsequently required the institution to reinstate the athletes. Unfortunately for Alvarado, they add, the timing of events may have cost him a college degree, at least from USM. The confluence of events involving the NCAA and USM is a result that USMNEWS.net sources suggested, several months ago, may occur. Now that the NCAA is hearing whistles being blown from people in Hattiesburg, how long will it be before that organization begins to look more closely at men's basketball and/or football?