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Iowa State Athletics: Ex-Cyclone coach Crowe awarded \$287,000

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A Polk County jury awarded former Iowa State softball coach Ruth Crowe \$287,000 in damages late Friday as part of a potentially wide-ranging verdict against Cyclone athletic officials for wrongfully firing Crowe in 2005.

"This issue wasn't about Ruth Crowe or about what kind of award she might get," Crowe said Saturday about the verdict. "What was most important was to bring to light the basic issue of inequality that athletes and coaches in women's sports at Iowa State had to face in the past. I truly hope that the current administration will make the kinds of improvements that need to be made."

Iowa State officials declined comment, but Bob Brammer, spokesman for the Iowa Attorney General's office, said: "We will consider all of our options, including appeal."

A five-woman, two-man jury delivered the verdict after about two hours of deliberation, following a five-day trial in which Crowe's lawyers painted their client's dismissal as retaliation for her complaining to faculty members and athletic department officials about inequitable compensation for most Cyclone coaches in women's sports, as well as a lack of comparable money for recruiting female athletes compared to male athletes.

Attorneys for Iowa State argued that Crowe's dismissal had nothing to do with her complaints, but rather was prompted by a poor win-loss record (166-244 in nine seasons), failure to attend Cyclone fundraising outings, complaints from a group of athletes about her handling of the team, and failures to act in a professional manner. During her tenure, Iowa State's softball teams failed to place higher than seventh in the Big 12 Conference.

Former athletic director Bruce Van De Velde dismissed Crowe - who had a controversial tenure that included objecting to a pregame invocation at Baylor and describing Texas A&M fans as "dumb farmers" after a raucous game in College Station - with one year remaining on her contract.

During the trial, Crowe said she wasn't aware until just before her termination that her job was in jeopardy. She also said she hadn't been aware of complaints from former players and their parents until after she filed her lawsuit.

Van De Velde did not testify, but Callie Sanders, senior associate athletic director, testified that she made the decision to fire Crowe.

Sanders said she had become concerned about complaints about Crowe as well as her team's lack of success.

The jury's verdict awarded Crowe \$90,000 in back pay, \$160,000 for past emotional distress and \$37,000 for future distress from her improper firing. But that might not be the only relief sought in the case, according to Tom Newkirk, Crowe's lawyer.

Newkirk said the verdict clears the way for Polk County Judge Scott Rosenberg to reinstate Crowe as softball coach or take other steps to provide equitable relief under Title IX. Those steps could include

Rosenberg ordering a complete audit of Iowa State's athletic compliance with Title IX and demanding improvements to the school's softball facilities.

Newkirk said that a hearing on what kind of relief should be provided is likely to be held next month after motions are filed by both sides.

Elaine Hieber, former senior women's athletic administrator at Iowa State, described the verdict as "a very fast one and at this point you have to admire Ruth Crowe for standing up in a very difficult time."

"This is a victory not only for Iowa State female athletes, but for student-athletes around the country," Hieber said.
