

Hofstra hit with lawsuit

■ An assistant for university's football program claims she was sexually harassed by team members

BY LUIS PEREZ

luis.perez@newsday.com

Hofstra University football Coach Dave Cohen and university officials defended themselves yesterday against charges in a federal lawsuit that a female team assistant was sexually harassed, locked in a bathroom and made to watch pornographic films during a road trip by members of the team while coaches did nothing.

Lauren E. Summa, 23, a speech communications major at the private Hempstead school who worked for the team from 2006 to 2007, twice complained to coaches and university administrators about a "rogue and sexist culture" on the team, but the suit, filed Friday, said they responded by quietly letting her go from her \$700-a-semester job.

Cohen said in a statement that he is "very proud of the way we conduct our football program and work with our student-athletes and the entire university community. I am confident that we handled this matter appropriately."

Summa's attorney, Douglas Wigdor of Manhattan, compared his client at a news conference to Anucha Browne Sanders, the Madison Square Garden executive who accused Knicks Coach Isaiah Thomas of sexual harassment and won her suit against the Garden.

"When you're a woman and you're working in a male-dominated environment, especially sports, especially football, these kinds of things happen," said the soft-spoken Summa, a Pittsburgh native.

In an e-mailed statement, the university acknowledged Summa's complaints while defending its conduct, opening the way for a court battle.

According to the suit, the abuse began as needling during

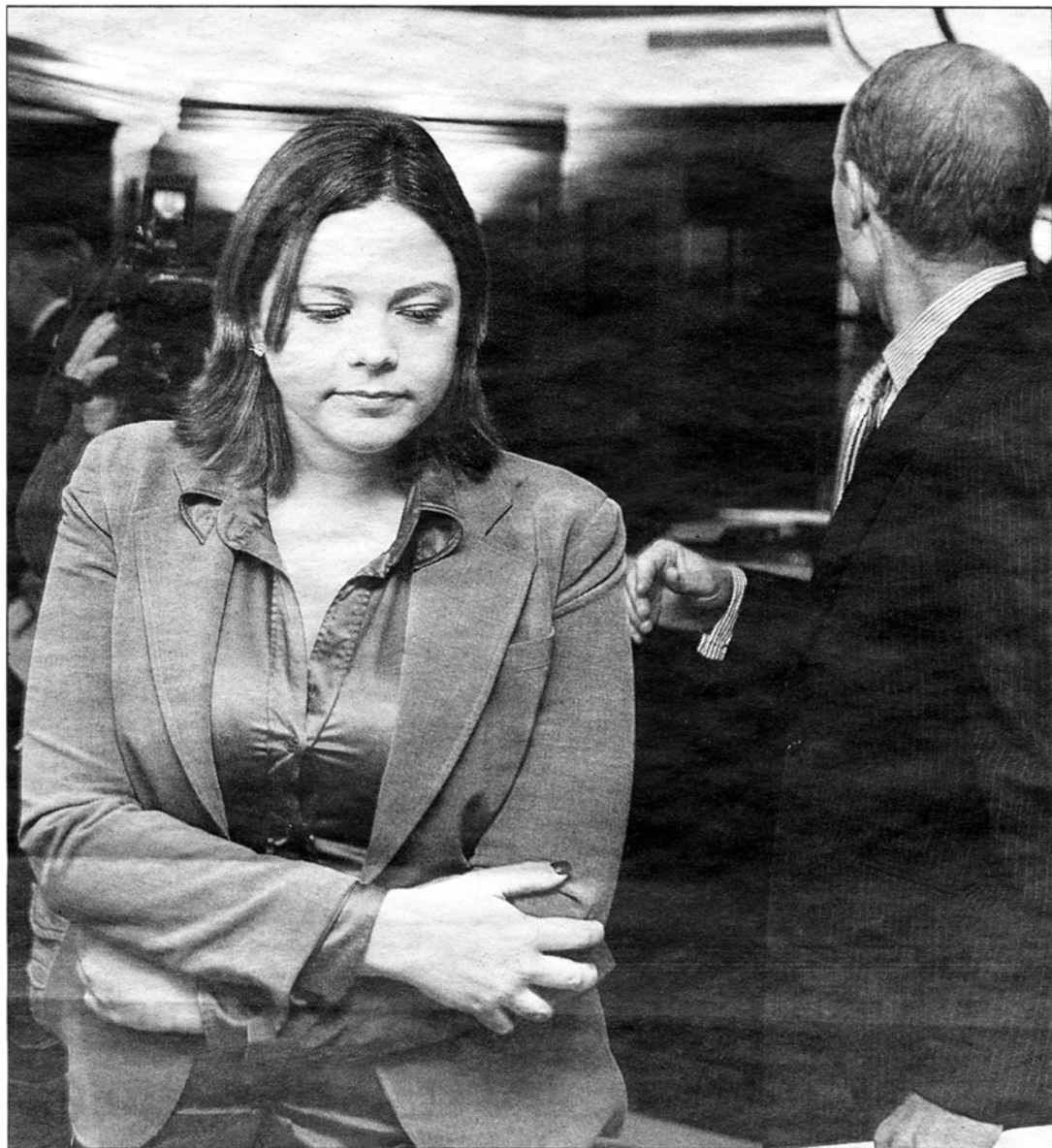


PHOTO BY DAVE SANDERS

Hofstra student Lauren Summa says she was forced to watch porn during a team road trip.

football practices in 2006, when players taunted Summa about her romantic relationship with a player, Philip Hall. It worsened during travel to other schools, where Summa was typically the sole female on the bus.

All the while, one or more team officials witnessed the behavior, the suit said.

During one bus trip to the University of Delaware, Summa's suit said, she was barricaded in a bathroom as male play-

ers laughed at her. Then, while on a trip to the University of Massachusetts, Summa said, she was forced to watch a pornographic video. The suit said an assistant coach, John Perry, put on the film.

After the trip, Summa made a complaint to Cohen, but according to the suit, he said the incident was "not serious" and "would only draw unneeded attention" to the team.

In the 2007 spring semester, Summa found her job at the

team was given to another student, while her application to another university job was also denied, the suit said.

At the campus yesterday, several football players declined to comment. But other students said they were stunned.

"At a collegiate level, I would think the maturity level would be higher," said junior Danielle Levesque, 21.

Sarah Portlock and staff writer Susana Enriquez contributed to this story.