Thursday, February 13, 1986

**Federal court** rules academics before athletics

A federal court jury Wednesday awarded \$2.57 million in back pay and damages to Jan Kemp, a former English instructor at the University of Georgia who said she was fired for speaking out against academic favoritism for student athletes.

The six-member U.S. District Court jury found that two Georgia officials -Vice President for Academic Affairs Virginia Trotter and Developmental Studies Director Leroy Ervin - violated Kemp's right to free speech by demoting and firing her.

"This is primarily a victory for academic integrity," said Kemp, who said the award went "beyond my wildest dreams.

Kemp testified that her reason for filing the suit was to "clean up academic corruption" at the school and that she would be happy if she won only \$1.

The central question was whether Kemp's demotion from English coordinator in the Developmental Studies program and her later dismissal as an instructor were in retaliation for her protests against preferential treatment of athletes.

But the trial became a forum on the way student athletes were admitted. graded and promoted at the school.

According to testimony, the university's admission standards were lowered for revenue-producing athletes, some athletes were promoted from the remedial program even if they were not meeting grade requirements, some were offered individual instruction, and some were given more than the usual four quarters to get through the remedial program.

University officials maintained that preferential treatment was available to any remedial student who needed it, but that athletes had the greatest needs.

State Attorney General Michael Bowers said he had not decided whether to appeal. The state has 30 days in which to file an appeal.

The jury of five women and one man deliberated 101/2 hours over three days before delivering the verdict. Testimony in the trial lasted five weeks.

The award included \$79,680 in back



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pay, \$200,000 in compensation for mental suffering, \$1 for damage to Kemp's reputation, \$1.5 million in punitive damages against Trotter and \$800,000 in punitive damages against Ervin.

A jubilant Kemp said she had not decided what to do with the money, although she planned to give some of it to her church, Living Faith Fellowship in Watkinsville, Ga.

Hue Henry, one of Kemp's attorneys, was surprised at the size of the award. "My first reaction was, 'Wow.' When they started talking a million dollars, I was ecstatic."

Pat Nelson, another of Kemp's attorneys, said the verdict would have far-reaching effects. "It was clear to the jury this is not just a problem in Athens, Ga.," he said.

"I think (the verdict) will encourage teachers and discourage administrators to go to court," Nelson said.

Trotter said she was surprised by the verdict and award. Ervin added, "I was just disappointed." Both officials said they planned to remain at Georgia.

Hale Almand, the attorney who represented Trotter and Ervin, said he believed inappropriate evidence had been allowed in the trial, and that hurt his case. "I had a sense that things got out of bounds very early on," he said.

Almand declined to specify what evidence he was referring to During the trial, he made repeated objections to hearsay testiments about afforts Ervin allegedly made to discredit Kemp.

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