

Other Sports

## Former student alleges abuse at renowned prep school ended hockey career



Jason Duckworth in the gymnasium at Athol Murray College of Notre Dame in 1987

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*Content Warning: The following article contains references to assault.*

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A former student and hockey player who attended Athol Murray College of Notre Dame in 1987-88 has filed a lawsuit alleging he was a victim of sexual, physical, mental and emotional abuse during his time at the Saskatchewan boarding school renowned for developing hockey talent.

Jason Duckworth filed his lawsuit March 7 in the Court of King's Bench for Saskatchewan. While TSN's policy is not to publish the names of alleged sexual assault victims, Duckworth said he wanted his name documented to encourage other survivors of abuse to come forward.

"When Duckworth attended Notre Dame he had a promising hockey future in front of him as he was a very talented young player," his lawsuit says.

“Duckworth attended Notre Dame exclusively because of the prestigious hockey program and the opportunities this would afford him in the future.”

While Duckworth’s lawsuit does not indicate how much money he is seeking from the school, his lawyers sent a letter to Notre Dame last summer demanding \$2 million to settle the case.

Located in Wilcox, Sask., Notre Dame is one of Canada’s most prestigious boarding schools. The Catholic priest James Athol Murray established Notre Dame College in 1933 and his legacy was formalized in 1981 when the school was renamed in his honour. The school is now co-ed and open to students from grades 9 to 12 of all faiths and backgrounds.

Notre Dame is famous for its hockey program, with the Hounds producing more than 100 NHL draft picks, including Wendel Clark, Curtis Joseph, Vincent Lecavalier, Brad Richards and Rod Brind’Amour.

Duckworth’s claims have not been tested in court and the school has not filed a statement of defence. The school didn’t respond to multiple requests for comment.

He told TSN that he played one game for Notre Dame's bantam AA team before he was cut following a dispute with the head coach.

Duckworth said he was 15 when he enrolled at Notre Dame in 1987-88 as a Grade 9 student. He alleged that when he arrived he was considered a “New Boy” as a young student.

“The ‘Old Boys’ were the larger, older, and more senior male students at Notre Dame,” his lawsuit says. “Old Boys were a clique of students who would harass, haze, bully, abuse, and torment the New Boys for their own amusement as part of an ongoing culture at Notre Dame.”

Duckworth alleges that he was forced to give Old Boys massages in their private dormitories and forced to listen to or watch other students being abused, including being forced to witness Old Boys inserting pencils into other students’ rectums.

He said he was once locked in a closet for an entire morning, was forced into fighting matches with other students, and was forced and tricked into eating food cooked in the urine of the Old Boys.

Duckworth also alleges teachers and coaches at Notre Dame encouraged the conduct of the Old Boys as a way of “toughening up” the New Boys and said he was punched in the face by former Notre Dame hockey coach Gerry Scheibel.

After he told the school nurse what had happened to him, Duckworth alleges other students beat him until he was unconscious.

“As a result of the abuse, Duckworth gave up hockey for a time and any possibility of a career in hockey vanished,” his lawsuit alleges. “Duckworth lost his passion and enjoyment of the game of hockey as a result of the abuse.”

Duckworth, who left Notre Dame after one year, wrote that his alleged abuse has caused him to suffer from chronic post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, suicidal tendencies and sexual dysfunction.

His lawsuit is at least the third filed against the school in recent years.

In 2021, former student Todd Tisdale filed a \$1.75 million personal injury lawsuit against Notre Dame, alleging was the victim of a series of vicious sexual, physical and psychological assaults during his brief time at Notre Dame in 1986, a year before Duckworth enrolled.

Tisdale told TSN on March 13 that his lawsuit is active and in the process of discovery.

In 2022, Cade and Sandra Phillips sued Notre Dame after their son, Colton, attended the school from September 2020 to June 2021 and then again from September to October 2021.

In their lawsuit, the Phillips alleged Colton was “experiencing mental and emotional trauma by the hands of the houseparent employed by Notre Dame...”

“The Houseparent would scream, yell, throw the students and other children’s shoes outside in the snow, wake them up at 6 a.m. to wash walls and made numerous threats about runs to the cemetery,” the Phillips’ lawsuit says.

“[Colton] also witnessed another child being struck in the face with a hockey stick during an outburst by the houseparent...

“[Colton] has shared his story with sports psychologists and an ex NHLer, who have advised him that he has endured things no child ever should have to,” the Phillips' lawsuit says, adding that Notre Dame's then-president, Robert Palmarin, dismissed their concerns.

When the Phillips advised Notre Dame that their son was withdrawing from the program and asked for the return of a \$10,000 payment, they said the school only agreed to do so after demanding the parents obtain a note from a doctor saying Colton did not have mental health issues before arriving at Notre Dame.

“We settled with [Notre Dame] and signed a non-disclosure agreement,” Sandra Phillips wrote TSN in an email. “Not the route we wanted to go but seemed to be the only option for us at that time. I can tell you that [Notre Dame] wanted the file sealed and we said no.”

<https://www.tsn.ca/other-sports/former-student-alleges-abuse-at-renowned-prep-school-ended-hockey-career-1.2092776>

The fall-out from this sick hockey culture keeps getting the hockey world here in trouble. Notre Dame, for all its promoters, has long had an unofficial reputation for this kind of stuff. Adolescent male iniquity cultivated and protected by over-grown products of the institutionalized mentality. TJB