

Gabby Douglas' remarks on racism and bullying prompt backlash from former gymnastics teammates and training gym

Gabrielle Douglas's former colleagues and coaches from Excalibur Gymnastics in Virginia Beach, Va. profess to be hurt and confused that the two-time Olympic gold medalist told Oprah Winfrey that she suffered from racism and bullying during her formative years of training.

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If Gabby Douglas experienced any form of racism or bullying during her formative training years in Virginia, that's news to Excalibur Gymnastics.

The Virginia Beach, Va. gymnasium that the two-time Olympic gold medalist referenced in a recent interview with Oprah Winfrey is fighting back against allegations that it or any of its coaches and gymnasts were racist toward Douglas.

"The accusations that are being made against the gymnasts and coaches are just sickening," Excalibur's Randy Stageburg told Gymnewstics.com in a statement. "Gabby was never a victim, in fact many would say she was one of the favorites. I never once heard her complain about girls being mean, funny how it is just now coming up."



In the "Oprah's Next Chapter" interview, which aired Sunday, the 16-year-old athlete recalled how she had a tough time assimilating to the environment, which she claims was tinged with racism.

"I was just, you know, kind of getting racist jokes, kind of being isolated from the group," she told Winfrey in the interview. "So it was definitely hard. I would come home at night and just cry my eyes out."

The Olympic athlete even recalled a specific incident, wherein "one of my teammates was like, 'Could you scrape the bar?' And they were like, 'Why doesn't Gabby do it, she's our slave.'"

The ill treatment got so bad, Douglas' mom Natalie Hawkins told Winfrey, that Douglas almost threatened to quit the sport altogether if she couldn't be transferred to work with another coach.

But Kim Hedeland, the mother of one of Douglas' former teammates, argues that the kind of bullying Douglas is describing simply didn't exist.

"I don't claim to know everything that happened in the situation with the gym and its gymnast who is now an Olympic athlete, but I do know that my daughter loved her like a sister for 7 years," she wrote on the gym's Facebook page.

"They were often partnered during training and slept in the same room during travel meets. They attended birthday parties and sleepovers together ... My daughter says that she was one of her best friends at the gym was very sad when she left."

Douglas also pointed to her race as the crux of why she was bullied, but according to Excalibur's CEO Gustavo Maure, the accusations of blatant racism are unfounded.

"Gabby's remarks were hurtful and without merit," Maure said in a statement to E! News. "We've had more African Americans in elite [sic] and on the national team than any other gym in the country. Her African American former teammates will answer this serious accusation ... We are good people. We never were knowingly involved in any type of bullying or racist treatment, like she is accusing Excalibur."