

# Tutor to top basketball players draws University of Memphis' scrutiny

*By Michael Cohen*

*10:36 AM, Apr 3, 2015*

The University of Memphis is investigating claims that a woman unaffiliated with the university provided academic assistance to former Tiger basketball players during their collegiate careers unbeknownst to the athletic department.

[Stacie-Leigh Greer](#), 45, told The Commercial Appeal she provided academic support to Chris Crawford and Adonis Thomas during high school and continued the relationships after they enrolled at Memphis. Her involvement in recent years, she said, included extra academic sessions arranged by the athletes, help with papers or essays sent to her by the athletes and holding weekend barbecues at her house, all of which has sparked an “internal inquiry” by the U of M.

Additionally, appearances by two players — Thomas and Andre Hollins, who played at the University of Minnesota — in a [promotional video](#) for an academic program Greer said she developed could pose eligibility concerns because their contributions remained published after they enrolled in college.

“I guess it just got to the point over the years where we just became family,” Greer told the newspaper in early February. “When it starts to get warm, I’ve got a Grizzlies basketball court in my backyard. Every Sunday I’d cook a full meal and the guys come over. Adonis, Chris, Will Barton has been in the yard, Antonio (Barton). Hell, there’s a lot of them. They just come for fun. They hear Miss Stacie cooks and we’re going over to play basketball.”

The comments from Greer came as a surprise to Memphis head coach Josh Pastner, who said he hadn’t heard of Greer until someone gave him a tip about an in-progress story by the newspaper. Upon learning Greer’s identity, Pastner notified the school’s compliance office to begin an internal review.

“I knew none of this,” Pastner said. “Zero. Zilch.”

An NCAA spokeswoman unfamiliar with the details of this story said it is permissible for student-athletes to accept tutoring services outside of their athletic departments if they are charged the same payment (or nonpayment) as any other customer. Greer said all of her tutoring is free of charge.

Still, the situation raised what Pastner described as a “red flag,” and he called Greer to arrange a meeting. Pastner said he and Jason Gray, the school’s assistant athletic director for compliance, “grilled her hard” about whether she did anything inappropriate with her academic assistance, such as actually doing the work for students.

Greer, who pleaded guilty to two felonies in 2004 connected to her educational work, told both the newspaper and the U of M that everything was above board.

“She just said she worked with local kids,” Gray said, “and we’re trying to talk to as many people as possible and figure out who those kids were and how it pertained to us.”

Greer told her story to the newspaper during a 75-minute interview at a Starbucks in early February. She described a journey from the Bluff City to the Ivy League and back, culminating in an intricate explanation of how she became perhaps the most sought-after tutor in Memphis basketball circles. Her list of purported clients contains more than two dozen former, current or future college basketball players, though she also tutors non-athletes.

Over the last two months, the newspaper has attempted to verify Greer’s account through roughly 20 interviews and a review of more than 100 pages of court documents. Her tutoring skills were unanimously praised.

The U of M said in a statement Friday that it was unaware of Greer’s work in the community until a few weeks ago. To date, the internal review has found “no evidence of any compliance violations with regard to Ms. Greer and her relationships with any University of Memphis student-athletes.”

Greer declined to comment further after her initial interview with the newspaper. She directed any additional inquiries to her attorney, Margaret Johnson.

“We’re unaware of any inquiry being conducted on any level,” Johnson said Thursday. “Once we determine what the issues are, we’re going to handle them accordingly. But until we know what’s going on, we’re just going to wait and see what’s happening.”

### **‘Helping for no apparent reason’**

Facing a TV that is looping old highlights, Ridgeway coach Wes Henning leans back in his desk chair as he tries to remember how long he has known Greer, a woman who showed up as if from nowhere with her son at one of Henning’s skill camps about 10 years ago.

“When I first met her, I just thought she wanted (her son) to get better,” Henning said. “But then as you get to talk to her she’s going to let you know that she’s doing a lot of things. And I’m like, ‘Oh, really?’ ... It’s just been on from there.”

Born in Memphis, Greer attended the prestigious Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire and then Cornell University, where she spent two and a half years. She finished her undergraduate degree in mathematics at the University of Memphis, during which time Greer said she worked as an official tutor in the athletic office. She sought private clients on the side by hanging fliers in libraries.

Her tutoring network expanded over the years, aided by teaching jobs with Memphis City Schools, the U of M and Christian Brothers High School. By the time she connected with

Henning, Greer had more than 10 years of experience and was the chief manager for 21st Century Learning Lab, LLC — her tutoring business.

Though her son did not attend Ridgeway, Greer became something of a popular figure at the school, Henning said. She held tutoring sessions three days per week and attended basketball games on off days to support her students. She assisted with both ACT prep and regular academic coursework.

Greer worked with groups as small as a handful of players and as large as a full classroom, Henning said. If someone needed one-on-one sessions, Greer did that too. All of it, Henning and Greer said, was free.

“She just came in and was helping for no apparent reason,” Henning said. “... So when a person comes in and their first assessment is to give, and they’re not asking for anything in return, you’re going to pretty much think that person is legit.”

Henning, who regularly attends get-togethers at Greer’s house and called her a friend, said word slowly began to spread through the city that Ridgeway had an ace academic resource. Calls trickled in from parents and coaches, Henning said, wanting to procure Greer’s services.

Her business was expanding.

“I wished I could have just kept her to ourselves,” Henning said, “but that’s impossible.”

### **‘Send me their papers’**

Having played basketball growing up in Memphis, Greer said she knew a number of high school and Amateur Athletic Union coaches who, like Henning, began asking her to help their players. One of the individuals she met over the years, she said, was Eric “Cowboy” Robinson, who runs the Memphis Magic AAU program.

“Cowboy just had all these athletes, and it just so happened that 75 percent of them needed some type of academic tutoring,” Greer said. “So he funneled a lot of players to me.”

It was through this connection that Greer said she took on three of her most high-profile pupils: Chris Crawford, Joe Jackson and Adonis Thomas — all of whom went on to play at the U of M.

Greer grouped Crawford and Thomas into a quintet of players that she said relied on her for help even after enrolling in college. She said three players in particular — Terrance Smith, formerly of Ridgeway and now at Cloud Community College; Keion Peoples, formerly of Hamilton and now at Missouri State University-West Plains; Kevin Shields, formerly of Ridgeway and now at Western Oklahoma State College — contacted her for assistance with various math or writing assignments.

“I swear,” Greer said, “I have kids in college that send me their papers.”

She added: “They may forward to me, honey, they take a picture of their essay or a math set of problems. Then I become that online tutor kind of, sort of, and say, ‘Hey, let’s go over these.’ But I do encourage them to reach out to their instructor.”

When asked if Crawford and Thomas sent her papers during their collegiate careers, Greer replied, “Yeah, yeah, yeah.” She also said there were times when Crawford and Thomas asked to meet for extra sessions.

Greer, who said she had previously relied on tutoring as a primary source of income, told the newspaper her work with Crawford and Thomas was done for free. Greer said she did away with charging for tutoring because she has “been blessed” monetarily and realized the majority of her clientele could not afford to pay.

Crawford, Jackson and Thomas all denied being tutored by Greer when reached by the newspaper. Crawford and Thomas both said they knew Greer, but Jackson said he did not. Robinson, who coached all three during their AAU careers, said Greer never worked with any of them.

“Coach Eric Robinson, he called me because he had told me about the (newspaper’s) story,” Thomas said. “I thought you were talking about another Ms. Stacie. ... When I figured out who y’all were talking about, I really didn’t do like any tutoring as far as my school work. I pretty much did my stuff on my own.”

Thomas’ father, Eric Thomas, offered a different recollection. He said he remembered all three boys — Crawford, Jackson and Thomas — working with a woman for tutoring during their time in Robinson’s AAU program. He couldn’t recall her name.

“I remember Joe and Chris and Adonis, they would set aside practice for them to go in there and do that,” Eric Thomas said.

As for the other three players mentioned by Greer — Smith, Peoples and Shields — none participated in an interview. When reached on Facebook, Smith wrote, “I’m sorry but I can’t give you any information about Ms. Stacie.”

Peoples and Shields both agreed to interviews but could not be reached at the scheduled times.

### **‘The hangout house’**

Though Thomas denied being tutored by Greer, he was the lone former Tiger to open up about the wealth of access Greer had to some of the top basketball players in the city. He confirmed Greer’s account of the weekly barbecues and pickup basketball games.

“We go over there every Sunday, and she usually cooks us a meal,” Thomas said. “All the guys get together, some of the guys around the city come and play. She has a full-size, regulation half court in her backyard with a regulation goal. We all go back there and play like 3-on-3, 4-on-4 in her backyard.”

The guest list, according to Thomas, includes Crawford, K.J. and Dedric Lawson, players from this year's Mitchell High state championship team, players from Southwind High and other neighborhood friends. Thomas said the gatherings began "around last year some time," and he continued to attend through August of 2014.

In her initial interview in February, Greer told the newspaper that Thomas, Crawford, Will Barton and Antonio Barton were among the attendees, though she did not offer a specific time frame for the get-togethers. There have been occasions, she said, when Crawford would crash in one of her extra bedrooms.

"It's the hangout house," Greer said. "That's what they pretty much call it."

Though Greer pointed out that she never offered academic assistance to the Barton brothers, both former Tigers, Will Barton said he remembered Greer as someone who tutored some of his teammates. He denied attending a barbecue at her house.

Crawford made no mention of attending barbecues during a texting conversation with the newspaper. Antonio Barton could not be reached for comment.

Thomas characterized Greer as a "close friend," someone he met through friends and family as much as through Robinson, his AAU coach. She came to support the local players during collegiate games, Thomas said, and both he and Crawford acknowledged that they knew her son, Kyndl, through basketball.

Thomas said he often heard Greer talking to the high school students about academics when they came to her house for pickup games. Still, he said he was unaware that she offered academic assistance.

"She would always talk about school work with those guys," Thomas said, "but I didn't know she did ACT help and all that stuff."

However, Thomas made an appearance in a promotional video for an academic program called [Math Skills-N-Drills](#) that Greer said she developed and copyrighted. The program's website lists both Henning and Greer's husband, Rickey Greer, as staff members.

The video, which still appears on the website and on YouTube, was uploaded to the Internet around the time Thomas graduated from high school. It also features Andre Hollins, who went on to play collegiately at Minnesota. Hollins did not respond to multiple requests for an interview.

"Although I love basketball, I truly value my education," Thomas said in the video. "The Math Skills-N-Drills program helped me understand how math directly relates to basketball in a unique way. The program made math simple for me. All students should have the opportunity to participate and watch their scores improve."

An NCAA spokeswoman unfamiliar with the details of this story said the eligibility of an individual could be affected if, upon enrolling in college, the student-athlete does not take the appropriate steps to retract permission for use of his name or picture and end receipt of any payment for appearing in the advertisement. This is usually done, according to the spokeswoman, in the form of a cease-and-desist order.

Follow-up calls to Thomas were not returned.

### **‘Except for the dishonest part’**

Greer’s recent pupils include a handful of players for Team Penny, the AAU program run by Penny Hardaway.

Most notably, Greer worked with K.J. and Dedric Lawson, a pair of elite recruits whose father, Keelon Lawson, is an assistant coach at Memphis, where the boys have signed on to play. Greer worked with them as often as four times per week, according to Romero Hill, a high school teammate of the Lawsons who also received tutoring.

Greer said she even traveled to three AAU tournaments this summer — in South Carolina, Dallas and Las Vegas — on her own dime to watch the games and also tutor the students in their hotel rooms as they prepared for fall ACT exams.

“Penny doesn’t pay for me to go,” Greer said. “They don’t pay for my hotel room. They pay nothing. So this is out of my own pocket, so I’ll just go. Heck, I want to see the games. And while I’m there, do you need some help getting ready for your exams? So bring your study guides.”

Hardaway did not respond to interview requests. Keelon Lawson agreed to an interview but could not be reached at the scheduled time. His wife, Dedra Lawson, did not respond to interview requests.

Absent from Greer’s narrative was any mention of a criminal record. Court documents obtained by the newspaper revealed Greer, referenced in the documents as Stacie Smith, pleaded guilty to two felonies in 2004, both connected to the educational company for which she was the chief manager.

Fayette County, according to the documents, was awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Education for use in remedial reading, math and other enrichment programs, and Greer was contracted to be the project administrator. She was later indicted for theft of property from the Fayette County Board of Education valued at \$60,000 or more and forgery for falsifying a contract.

Eventually, Greer pleaded guilty to theft of property valued between \$10,000 and \$60,000 and entered an Alford plea for the forgery charge, according to court documents. Her sentence included two weekends of jail time, \$20,000 in restitution and three years of probation.

“Stacie did an excellent job,” said Myles Wilson, former superintendent of the Fayette County Schools, according to court documents, “except for the dishonest part.”

**U OF M'S FRIDAY STATEMENT:**

At this time, the University has no knowledge of any compliance issues regarding any of our programs and Ms. Greer. Until a few weeks ago, we were unaware of Ms. Greer’s work in the Memphis community. In our internal review, we’ve found no evidence of any compliance violations with regard to Ms. Greer and her relationships with any University of Memphis student-athletes. The University of Memphis Athletics Program is and will remain committed to the letter and intent of American Athletic Conference and NCAA rules regarding compliance and academic integrity. If any compliance issues arise, the University will respond accordingly.