

## Coaches sue over hiring

■ Southampton High accused of choosing women for athletics positions men say they were more qualified for

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STAFF REPORTER

Two men who worked as coaches in the Southampton School District sued the district yesterday, claiming that it illegally passed them over for jobs in favor of less experienced women.

The lawyer for Michael Zimbler, and Vincent Mangano, who still works at the high school, filed the lawsuit yesterday in U.S. District Court in Central Islip.

The district has denied the allegations. The lawyer for the district and its athletic director, who was named in the suit, didn't return phone calls.

The men's allegations have received a boost from a State Division of Human Rights investigation, which began after they filed a complaint in 2004. In separate findings, both issued in Decem-

ber, the agency said that it had "probable cause" to believe the men had faced discrimination.

But their lawyer, who had the option to continue to pursue the case through the division, decided instead to sue in court.

"I am confident that when a jury hears what happened to my clients, that they will make the same findings," said Rick Ostrove, of Leeds, Morelli & Brown in Carle Place.

Mangano, 49, an employee of the district since 1978, has worked as a head varsity football coach, assistant boys track coach and the assistant girls winter track coach at Southampton High School.

On Feb. 9, 2004, he met with the district's high school athletic director, Darren Phillips, about being named coach for the girls spring track team, the complaint said. Two varsity track coaches had recommended him, but Phillips said he was looking for a female coach, according to the suit.

Zimbler, 38, who worked at the school from 1999 until he resigned in 2004, coached several athletic teams including wres-



Michael Zimbler, left, and Vincent Mangano are suing the Southampton School District, alleging they were passed over for coaching jobs because the athletic director wanted women to coach the school's girls teams.

PHOTO BY GORDON AL GRANT

tling, football and softball. He coached the girls junior varsity softball team from 2000 to 2003.

On Dec. 18, 2003, the athletic director met with Zimbler and Jessica Zukosky, the girls varsity softball coach, who didn't know if she could finish that season because she was pregnant, according to the lawsuit. In that meeting, Phillips asked Zimbler if he would assist her and take over if she had to leave. Phillips said that Zimbler's prior experience with the girls junior varsity team would provide a smooth transition.

But two months later, Phillips, without explanation, said Zimbler wouldn't get the assistant coaching job or be renewed as the girls junior varsity coach, the complaint says.

The plaintiffs complained to the head of the Southampton Teachers Association and on Feb. 11 met with him and the director. In that meeting, the director reiterated that he wanted a woman instead of Mangano for the track positions, according to the suit, which also said that the union rep responded that was discriminatory.

Later, the complaint says, the director put an unfavorable

evaluation in Mangano's personnel file but withdrew it after the plaintiff complained to the union.

Of the women eventually hired for the two jobs Zimbler wanted, one had never coached softball and the other had never coached at all, according to the complaint and the division of human rights.

"The documentary evidence ... supports the complainant's contention that his qualifications and experience surpass those of the female candidates," the report states.

The lawsuit seeks compensatory and punitive damages.