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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Veteran Massage Therapists Discuss Working With Deshaun Watson

HOUSTON (March 31, 2021) – During the past two weeks, the law office of Rusty Hardin & Associates has received dozens of unsolicited phone calls, letters, emails and text messages from professional massage therapists who have worked with Deshaun Watson.

These women say they are deeply troubled by the accusations made against Deshaun and that these claims are wholly inconsistent with their experiences with him and who they believe him to be. All of them stated that Deshaun never made them feel uncomfortable or demanded anything outside the scope of a professional massage. None of them experienced any of the behavior alleged by anonymous plaintiffs in the numerous lawsuits filed by the same Houston attorney.

The following 18 women are voluntarily issuing statements in support of Deshaun – with their names attached. “Collectively, they have worked with Deshaun more than 130 times over the past five years,” said Rusty Hardin, founding partner of Rusty Hardin & Associates. “These statements show the other side to this story that has been so lacking in the flurry of anonymous complaints filed by opposing counsel.”

Here are their statements in their own words.

Myah Roberson is a licensed massage therapist, who has been working in Houston for 10 years, primarily on athletes.

“I started working with Deshaun in December 2019 after being referred to him by another therapist. He sent me a screenshot of a diagram that the head trainer

of the Texans gave him, highlighting the muscles that needed to be worked on, which included the groin and hamstrings. He asked if I felt comfortable working on those areas and I said yes, because I am used to working on athletes.

During the massage, Deshaun was more comfortable using a towel than draping sheets over the table; this isn't unusual at all. I have several clients that prefer using a towel over sheet. We began using a towel, and that became the norm. When I saw that the first lawsuit mentioned a towel, I chuckled because I gave him that idea. And it's not inappropriate because they teach you in massage school that using a towel is okay. Some of these accusations are so ludicrous. I just can't see him doing any of those things. He was never inappropriate with me. I never felt threatened in any way."

Sara Fetherolf is a licensed physical therapist with a degree in Dynamic Neuromuscular Stabilization who also works as a strength and conditioning coach. In these roles, she has performed extensive tissue work and body manipulation on professional athletes for the past decade. She considers herself a "movement specialist" who concentrates on the function of muscles and joints.

"On July 16, 2020, I performed a very thorough massage on Deshaun, focusing on his lower back, hips and groin, at a home he was renting while visiting Los Angeles. He is one of the most professional athletes I ever worked on. When the session was over, Deshaun helped me put away my table and walked me to my car. Because it was already quite late, Deshaun texted me during my drive home to make sure I had gotten home safely. My experience was nothing like the plaintiffs are describing. I don't believe they are being truthful."

Kaleigh Galindo has been a licensed massage therapist since 2018. She specializes in lymphatic, Swedish, deep tissue and sports massages.

"I worked on Deshaun Watson several times from August to December in 2020. He was respectful in every session. I never had any issues with him being inappropriate. Focus areas requested were hip flexors, groin (adductors), glutes, hamstrings, quads, lower back, abdominals. These are common areas of strain with pro athletes, especially those who play his position. He was always hospitable and communicated to make sure I always felt comfortable and safe. Many people idolize Deshaun Watson and perceive him as a legend. However, in getting to know him, I know he's just your regular 25-year-old."

Masako Jones has been a licensed therapist for the past six years.

“I have worked with Deshaun several times since October 2019 and he’s never been anything other than professional and polite. We would focus on areas that were strained or injured, his shoulder, quads, calves, adductors, glutes, feet, things like that. That’s not odd or inappropriate; you have to think about how athletes use their bodies, the stances they’re in, how they move during games. All of those areas are typical, especially for football players.

Deshaun never made me feel uncomfortable or intimidated. He’s rather quiet compared to other professional athletes I’ve worked with. I am just completely floored by these lawsuits. The behavior described in them doesn’t sound like him at all. I can’t even imagine him saying those things or doing those things.”

Luretia Dany Craig received her therapy license from the Atlanta School of Massage in 2008. She primarily works with athletes, active adults and entertainers.

“I massaged Deshaun three times. He was always pleasant. I never had any uncomfortable or inappropriate experiences with him. He often listened to his music and said very little. During my career, unfortunately I have experienced inappropriate situations where I stopped a massage. This never happened with Deshaun. He was respectful to my craft.

Deshaun specifically came to me requesting I work on his lower body. I worked his hamstrings, quadriceps as well as his glutes and lower abs. Asking for these muscle groups to be massaged is not uncommon for athletes. Working those muscles from origin to insertion is imperative to properly treat the muscle. If a therapist is inexperienced in this type of work, I could imagine it may make them uncomfortable trying to translate the ‘layman’s’ suggestion on how to stop the discomfort. It is important for a therapist to talk through any request with the client to determine exactly what hurts; as even the most educated person loses their anatomy knowledge when in pain.”

Norma Reyna is board-certified in therapeutic massage and body work. She formerly served as the Director of Memorial Hermann’s massage school and as the Supervisor of Houston Methodist’s massage program. Currently, Ms. Reyna is in private practice and a therapist for some dancers of the Houston Ballet. She frequently works with NFL and MLB athletes and was hired by the Brazilian government to train massage therapists to work on players who participated in the 2014 World Cup.

“I frequently observed Deshaun attending sessions with another therapist who works in the same building next door to me. I have never observed Deshaun

acting in an inappropriate manner and he never appeared to make anyone uncomfortable. He was always cordial when he walked by.

Glutes, lower abs, psoas and adductors are very common areas for athletes – both males and females – to request their therapists to work on. You must release the psoas and gluteal muscles to release tension in the lower back. There's a proper and professional way to address this area with proper draping and communication. When working the adductors and groin/pelvic area, it is not uncommon to accidentally graze the penis, but you don't engage it. I teach my students to use a firmer touch or to move to a different area if a client gets aroused during a session, which sometimes happens.

There's a professional way to deal with it. If a therapist feels uncomfortable at any time during the session, he or she has the ability to end the session and immediately file a complaint with the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulations and vice versa. You don't get a lawyer and file a lawsuit or go to the news media. You file a complaint immediately.”

Kam Phommyuong has been a massage therapist for about 15 years in Houston.

“I first met Deshaun about three years ago. He was a regular of ours, and I worked on him twice – both times a combo Tai and deep tissue massage. He wore boxers for both sessions. I found him to very polite and respectful. I didn't even know he was a professional football player during his first appointment. Myself and my co-workers were really shocked to hear about the lawsuits and allegations, because Deshaun never hinted at or did anything improper.”

Nalisha Storm has been a licensed massage therapist since June 2020 and works in Atlanta.

“Deshaun first contacted me in February of this year by direct message on Instagram after he saw a flyer that I had posted. I have worked on him two times and in both instances he asked for a sports massage with a focus on his abs, abductors, thighs and glutes. Each session lasted an hour and he supplied the draping towel, which was the size of a beach towel.

Deshaun was very respectful and professional towards me. He was also very quiet, listening to music on his phone. After each session, he thanked me and said he would be contacting me again for another massage.”

Dr. Arielle Ball is a licensed physical therapist and Director of Rehabilitation Services at a hospital in Houston. She specializes in sports performance and injury. Prior to joining the Houston hospital in 2016, Dr. Ball spent seven years working as a physical therapist in the Atlanta area.

“I worked with Deshaun several times in 2019 and 2020. He was very quiet during our sessions, often played his music and zoned out. Like most athletes, he requested that I focus on his hamstrings, abs and adductors. He never made me uncomfortable and was always professional during our sessions.”

Jas Brooks is a licensed massage therapist in Texas with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in kinesiology from Texas Southern University. She is certified in lymphatic drainage massage, prenatal massage, oncology massage, decompression (cupping), Graston technique and cryotherapy. She is currently a medical staff member for Team USA track and field.

“I began providing massage therapy to Deshaun in 2018 and have massaged him at least 40 times since then. I worked with him once or twice a week during the season and as needed during the off season. Early on, he said he wanted me to focus on his hamstrings (he had a trainer that worked on his upper body) and just to work the lactic acid out of his legs. This included the groin, glutes and feet. He never asked me any questions and hardly ever spoke at all. In all that time, I never had a single uncomfortable or inappropriate experience with Deshaun.”

Ashley Thomas became a licensed massage therapist in Oklahoma in 2007 and now owns a spa in Grand Prairie, Texas.

“I first worked on Deshaun at a hotel in Houston in December of 2019 after reaching out to him on Instagram. I remember Clemson was in town that day for a football game and Deshaun watched it during his session. Before the appointment, he laid out what he wanted in very clear terms: he was only interested in a professional massage.

I worked on him four or five times total, the last time being in June 2020. He was always pretty quiet and never anything but respectful, he was the sweetest guy. The sessions were very professional – he arrived, got his massage, and he left. I’ve never heard anything negative about him and I was completely thrown off guard by the recent allegations.”

LaWonda Howard has been a licensed massage therapist for three years and works in Houston.

“I first met Deshaun about a year ago when he reached out on Instagram. I had two therapy sessions with him, both of which were uneventful. On the first, he was just focused on his areas of concern and the pressure. He listened to music and scrolled on his phone on the second session. He was never inappropriate or did anything to make me feel uncomfortable. He asked that I focus on areas that are typical for athletes: glutes, hamstrings, quads and groin. He was appropriately and properly draped with a towel, which is common with sports clients.

Deshaun was respectful before, during and after both visits. I am puzzled by the allegations in the lawsuits and in the media, as they are not consistent with Deshaun’s character.”

Nadiyah Luqman is a licensed therapist certified in sports and orthopedic massage in Houston. A lower back specialist for nearly a decade, she has taught courses at Hand & Stone Memorial and graduated with honors from Stone School of Massage.

“I massaged Deshaun on August 12, 2020 at my office in Houston. He asked me to pay attention to his glutes, hamstrings and abductors. This was consistent with requests I have received from other athletes I have worked with in the past. He was always respectful and quiet, and I never felt uncomfortable.”

Ana Compean has been a licensed massage therapist in Houston for the past 8 years.

“I first met Deshaun in 2017 at a spa where I worked, which he would visit once or twice a week. I worked on him six or seven times over the next three years. He would always want his back, shoulder and arms massaged, and he asked for deep tissue massages as well.

Deshaun was always draped during massages and a couple of times he even asked for an extra towel because he was cold. He was completely covered. He never said much during the massage, he was very quiet. He would always say ‘yes ma’am or no ma’am.’ I never had any problem with him and I never heard anyone say anything bad about Deshaun.”

Raechal Martin is an athletic trainer and licensed massage therapist.

“I massaged Deshaun four times at his house and at the Houstonian. When we first met, he asked if I was comfortable with glutes, lower legs, and groin and I said yes. As an athletic trainer, this was a normal request. Deshaun barely talked; he was super quiet and passive. He has been one of the easiest clients I have ever had. That’s what makes these accusations against him so infuriating. Any licensed therapist knows that you may graze the penis during the course of the massage and you are taught how to address it professionally. You are also taught that the therapist is in charge and to immediately speak up if something makes you uncomfortable.”

Joanne Brito has been a licensed therapist for almost 14 years, specializing in sports massage.

“I started treating Deshaun in early 2020 and have provided him massage therapy three to five times in all, the last time being in November 2020. He tells you what areas he wants worked on – usually groin, glutes and abs, which is normal for athletes. I always found him to be polite, respectful, professional and absolutely nonaggressive.”

Tina Nguyen has been a licensed massage therapist for 10 years, working at a spa in Houston.

“I first met Deshaun three years ago and have provided massages to him several times. He wanted to focus on stretching and deep tissue massage. He never asked for, or even hinted at, anything inappropriate. He was always polite and respectful. When I eventually realized who he was, I asked him to have his picture taken with me to give to my son, who is a big fan.”

Kya Hillman is a retired disabled veteran and licensed esthetician working in Spring, Texas. She worked on Deshaun three times between October and December of 2020.

“I worked with Deshaun to give him full body scrubs and body wraps. At no time did he act inappropriate with me. If he did, I would have talked with him and handled it with him.”

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