

JANUARY 17, 2026 | NEWS

Shumaker Secures Court Ruling Clearing Donovan “Puff” Johnson to Play, Boosting Ohio State Basketball

COLUMBUS, OH— Shumaker Law Firm announced today that an Ohio court granted a Temporary Restraining Order allowing Ohio State men’s basketball player Donovan “Puff” Johnson to continue his collegiate career, blocking the NCAA from enforcing eligibility restrictions that would have ended it. The ruling immediately permits Johnson to be able to play for the 2025–2026 men’s basketball season while the case proceeds.

“This decision comes at a pivotal moment for college athletics, as the NCAA continues to grapple with the realities of the NIL era,” said Shumaker Partner Nicholas Stack. “Courts across the country are increasingly questioning whether legacy eligibility rules, designed for a very different collegiate sports landscape, can be fairly applied to today’s athletes, whose development, exposure, and earning potential are often tied to each and every season of competition.”

Johnson had petitioned the NCAA for a Medical Hardship Waiver to preserve his eligibility for this current season. The NCAA denied the request and applied its Five-Year Rule, a rigid eligibility clock that limits the total time an athlete may compete at the collegiate level. Together, those decisions would have permanently ended Johnson’s college basketball career.

Shumaker attorneys argued on Johnson’s behalf that strict application of the NCAA’s eligibility rules under these circumstances caused irreparable harm and was likely unlawful under Ohio’s Valentine Act.

“This ruling ensures that an athlete is not permanently deprived of his final season due to circumstances beyond his control, particularly where medical misdiagnosis and premature return-to-play decisions played a critical role,” Stack said.

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In support of the motion, Shumaker submitted detailed reports from two expert witnesses, Dr. David Berri, Ph.D., a sports economist at Southern Utah University, and Dr. B. David Ridpath, Ed.D., of Ohio University, providing a depth of analysis rarely presented at the initial stage of collegiate eligibility challenges.

This case marks the fifth eligibility challenge Shumaker attorneys have brought against the NCAA and the fourth time the firm has successfully secured preliminary equitable relief for its clients. The case was led by Shumaker attorneys Nicholas Stack, Evan Bunis, Diana Florence, Jacob Mertus, Mark Wagoner, and Sports group co-chairs Bennett Speyer and Robert Boland. The Temporary Restraining Order remains in effect for 14 days and may be extended as the case continues.

“It is our hope that the NCAA will work to implement reasonable, pro-athlete and pro-education reforms that reflect the realities of modern college athletics,” sports co-chair Boland said. “Such reforms would better protect athletes and help avoid unnecessary litigation in the future.”