

TRANSADVOCATE

What Happens When You Ask AI to Rank Anti-Trans Athletes on Athletic Merit Alone

By Marti Abernathey

Published September 10, 2026

https://www.transadvocate.com/what-happens-when-you-ask-ai-to-rank-anti-trans-athletes-on-athletic-merit-alone_n_124443.htm

Abstract

Riley Gaines, Sophie Cunningham, and Enes Kanter (Freedom) are three athletes from three different sports who've each found a lane in the "anti-trans women in sport" media grift. The grift isn't a side hustle -- for two of them, it's the whole career now.

Article



Riley Gaines, Sophie Cunningham, and Enes Kanter (Freedom) are three athletes from three different sports who've each found a lane in the anti "trans women in sport" media grift. But look closer, and they share something else: none of them were ever dominant in their actual sport. The grift isn't a side hustle -- for two of them, it's the whole career now.

To take my own bias out of it, I asked AI to rank each of them purely on athletic merit.

Riley Gaines -- AI's assessment: "her standing is best described as: a top-5 national finisher in individual events during her senior year, a Kentucky school-record holder in multiple events, and a 12-time All-American, but not an NCAA champion or record-holder at the national level."

Sophie Cunningham -- "Sophie Cunningham doesn't hold any all-time WNBA statistical rankings -- she's a solid role player, not a franchise or league record-holder." The AI even corrected itself mid-answer to clarify her numbers are still active and accumulating, but the verdict stood: no all-time rankings, a career defined more by her college years than her pro ones.

Enes Kanter (Freedom) -- "Enes Kanter Freedom doesn't hold any top all-time NBA career rankings -- he's not among league leaders in points, rebounds, or any major statistical category historically."

To put some structure around it, I had Perplexity's Sonar Pro build a 7-tier "all-time great" ranking system -- from GOAT (Jordan, Pelé, Gretzky-level) down to Replacement Level/Fringe Pro -- and slot all three athletes in.

The verdict: Gaines and Cunningham landed in Tier 4, "Star / Very Good" -- consistent performers, key contributors, but missing the individual dominance or accolades to go higher. Kanter landed in Tier 5, "Solid Starter / Above Average" -- a long career built on a supporting role, not a leading one.

Even that felt generous. The AI's closing note called all three "middle tier with potential for further achievement" -- but Gaines and Kanter haven't competed since 2022. There's no "further achievement" coming. Cunningham is the only one of the three still active. The other two aren't building a career anymore. They're monetizing the one they already finished. From Louisville Public Media's interview with journalist Madison Pauly:

Gaines has never made money directly from swimming (never competing professionally), but she has shown that grifting to the right is profitable. In the sporting world Gaines, Kanter, and Cunningham are all mid-tier athletes, but in right-wing circles they definitely are well paid all-stars.

Suggested citation

Marti Abernathy. "What Happens When You Ask AI to Rank Anti-Trans Athletes on Athletic Merit Alone." TransAdvocate, September 10, 2026.

https://www.transadvocate.com/what-happens-when-you-ask-ai-to-rank-anti-trans-athletes-on-athletic-merit-alone_n_124443.htm