

## O P I N I O N

## Editorial...

## Youth sports becoming a minefield

The Sisters school athletic community was roiled last week when the Sisters School District sent out notice that it has “received a complaint and tort claim notice about the coaching staff for our girls high school basketball team. The allegation is that the coaching staff has verbally and emotionally abused some members of the team this past season...”

As of last week, no legal action had been filed.

*The Nugget* has spoken with a number of people involved in or familiar with the girls basketball program and it is safe to say that perspectives are vastly different, highly passionate, and possibly irreconcilable. Parents naturally seek to protect their children from harm. And those who have seen their children thrive in a program are ardent in their support of coaches who make that happen.

Youth sports can bring a community together — controversy in youth sports can tear a community apart. Reputations can be permanently damaged, relationships can be ruptured, and schools can find programs that are supposed to add value becoming a source of conflict and disruption.

Perhaps the current issue can be worked out among the parties involved. If it becomes a legal issue, it will go to an entirely different level. In the meantime, it is best to bear in mind that support of one does not require an attack on another, and that rushing to judgment in any direction is always harmful.



Jim Cornelius, Editor in Chief

## Letters to the Editor...

*The Nugget* welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. *The Nugget* reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is noon Monday.

To the Editor:

As a lifelong educator, I read your recent letters to the editor with great concern. I am referring specifically about the alleged abuse and pending litigation regarding coaches' behavior in Sisters SD.

I understand that we are living in a small town, and rumors can become rampant quickly, but it was surprising to see such a one-sided story and no actual follow-up or investigation. One of the “guest commentaries” was even printed without a related news story; something I have not seen professional news sources do. As we are such a small community, there will always be opportunities for people to share private information or share uncorroborated information easily. Some of the writers are affiliated with the SD offices, or with law enforcement. Some have outside relationships with coaches, or our children

have outside relationships with the coaches. This breeds cronyism and favoritism that is hard to avoid, but it seems no effort was made to avoid this pitfall.

Furthermore, it is absolutely baffling that these persons, some mandatory reporters, were not clear on how and when outsiders speak on pending child abuse or endangerment claims. The protocol is clear and mandatory, and appears to have been violated. I actually understand that restriction, so will not be speaking in specific terms, but will share my concerns in a more general way.

Children are to be believed. They are to be believed when they report abuse. They are to be believed when they report being afraid. Not only is this the right and moral thing to do, it is also the legal thing to do. We are not in the

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## Athletics should be an extension of the classroom

By Joey Hougham  
Guest Columnist

This letter responds to the letters written both in support and against the Sisters High School girls' basketball coaches. Rather than delve into case-specific details of the complaints against those coaches, I would urge the community to step back and consider the purpose of high school athletics. The real intent of athletics is to teach our kids about teamwork, leadership, persistence, goal-setting, and how to treat one-another in a group setting. These are the values that help players win throughout their personal and professional lives.

Bullying is an impediment to these values and is a big problem in schools. Bullying is not something unique to kids. They learn it from adults. That's why it is so important that teachers and coaches model appropriate behavior. The Sisters High School Coaches' Manual contains several passages imploring coaches to instruct in a positive and energizing way to advance the athletes' physical, emotional, and moral development. In other words, coach for character. The coaches manual also states “Our coaches believe that their work is an extension of the classroom.” Do we expect our schools to practice what they preach? If so, then we should challenge any coach that models bullying as a coaching style.

A child should not have to endure the threat of public humiliation and intimidation to participate in a publicly-funded school program. The purpose of school sports is to teach kids skills they can use in the classroom, in their careers, and in personal relationships throughout their lives. If a coach's behavior would not be tolerated in the classroom, workplace, or family environment, then it should not be tolerated on the field, on the court or in the locker room. Otherwise we are teaching our kids a double standard.

For decades we have

given coaches license to express behavior that would not be accepted in any classroom, workplace, or home. That license has been revoked at the college and professional levels, where coaches are now expected to treat their players with respect. So, why hasn't Sisters High School changed its ways? Why does it not only tolerate, but encourage, behavior by coaches that has been universally rejected as unfit for college and professional locker rooms since the turn of the last century?

Certainly, not all of the athletes have experienced bullying. That is, of course, the nature of bullying. Bullies often isolate individuals within a group for a variety of reasons. Those not being bullied are often just glad that they're not being picked on. Just because one child is not bullied, doesn't mean that child is unaffected. In fact, the kids who are spectators to such bullying are prone to model that behavior and become bullies themselves.

There are times when parents need to advocate for children because kids are not always equipped to handle issues like bullying and abuse, especially if the source comes from another adult. Parents can model support and compassion by standing up to inappropriate behavior.

Whether or not a student athlete has been bullied or abused is not something that should be decided by which side generates the most media attention or by how many supporters show up to defend a coach at school board meetings. Forcing kids, the victims of any abuse, to defend themselves in the media only perpetuates the problem.

Finally, let's put this topic into perspective and put our kids first. In today's climate, we should be demanding that our sports programs be an extension of the classroom. Coaches should model appropriate behavior so that our kids can learn what it's like to be a good human being.

*Opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and are not necessarily shared by the Editor or The Nugget Newspaper.*

## Sisters Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
Partly Cloudy 74/49	Partly Cloudy 74/50	Mostly Sunny 77/50	Sunny 79/50	Sunny 79/47	Mostly Sunny 77/46

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