

From the Editor

Reinventing how we cover sports

Adaptation is the constant in this pandemic. Like all other businesses and organizations during this crisis, The Observer newsroom has adapted how we operate, with reporters working remotely at times and covering meetings online or over the phone.

And now sports are in full swing and we've barely scratched the surface of what's happening there. I want to explain to our readers why.

The Observer's newsroom has been small for years, but now we're down to me, reporter Dick Mason, newsroom clerk Lisa Lester Kelly and multimedia journalist Alex Wittwer, the newest member of the team.

We don't have a sports reporter, nor a sports editor. We had to cut back a little on how many hours news staff work per week. We're not allowing reporters to work overtime. We're trying to fill a reporter position, but that person will not exclusively cover sports. Some sports, sure, but also plenty of news.

So our newsroom has fewer resources available than in years past, no one we can dedicate to sports and we're still following COVID-19 protocols. Sending a reporter to cover one game of any sport now is a serious commitment of time and resources.

This scenario says to me we cannot cover sports like we used to. Full game recaps, for example, are a time-intensive practice we cannot afford to provide. Even calling a round of coaches post game for quick comments could be a stretch.

But then, I'm not a big fan of long game recaps and lists of statistics. And if there is any time to reexamine how we cover sports, this is it.

I'm keen to turn Alex loose and see what he can do to tell a game or a drive or match in photos without long write-ups. We also are going to experiment with Alex conducting and videoing 1-2 minute post-game interviews with student-athletes about key moments in a game or match from their particular point of view. Why did that wrestler make the move she did? How did that wide receiver know he had the coverage beat? Those simple questions could lead to some interesting firsthand insights. I think we could call those segments "The Breakdown."

They would be web only. But then, a lot more of our sports coverage is likely to be there. Our press time for papers is 5 p.m. the day before delivery. We're not breaking many sports stories and scores, then, in the print edition.

Profiles of athletes and coaches are another way we can cover sports, along with bigger looks at the ongoing pressures from COVID-19, such as how teams revamped their training and practice for the pandemic. We also can look at what is happening — or is not happening this season — on the periphery of sports with school bands, cheerleaders and such.

I've asked our tech folks to look into the possibility of a "portal" so spectators, coaches or players might have an easy way to send in photos or quick comments about games and events. If something comes of that, we'll let you know.

Until then, you can submit photos and information to our Facebook page via Messenger. We might be able to run some submissions in print, and more will live on our website, www.lagrandeobserver.com.

These are not the only ideas, and not all of what we attempt will work out. But failure is a good teacher.

We also will listen to suggestions from readers. If you have ideas about sports coverage, please share them. Probably the best partnerships we can have in covering local sports is with our readers and the community.



Letters to the editor

EOU funding: KEOL vs. athletics

I was quite taken aback when I read Zachary Cahill's comments in The Observer's March 6 article "Dead Air" that the Eastern Oregon University radio station should be defunded because radio may become obsolete, and then the inference that a college radio station would not help prepare students for careers.

There are 1,168 public broadcasting stations in the United States, including our own award-winning Oregon Public Broadcasting station. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting's mission is to ensure universal access to non-commercial, high-quality content and telecommunications services that are commercial free and free of charge.

I fail to see how a college radio station is not relevant in preparing students for this important work. EOU spends hundreds of thousands of dollars on athletic programs, but how many students will have a career in professional sports?

Teresa Gustafson
La Grande

Leave partisan politics out of redistricting

In 2019, Sen. Michael Dembrow made the following remarks about the GOP walkout protesting cap and trade: "We know that the voters want us to be creating this program. Every legislator that was in a contested race in 2018 ran on this issue. The governor ran on this issue. We picked up seats in both chambers in part over this issue."

In 2018, Democrats won 38 House seats and 11 Senate seats. In 40 House seats, Democrats had a voter registration advantage over Republicans at an

average of 9,357.13, while Republicans had a voter registration advantage in just 20 House seats at an average of 5,160.5. Fourteen House seats had a Democratic voter registration advantage greater than 10,000, versus just one House District with a Republican voter registration advantage that size. House District 43 had a Democratic advantage of 31,000.

Decades of partisan redistricting created a system where the majority party picks and chooses voters. Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney have used the power of their office to deny nonpartisan redistricting proposals. Oregonians deserve a system that allows voters, not parties, to choose the candidates who best represent their communities.

While the authority to draw district maps remains with the Legislature, legislators must look beyond their electoral interests and ensure all possible districts are equally divided between Republicans, Democrats and Independents. Voter registration advantages should be in the dozens, not tens of thousands. This is the only road forward to unity and honest policymaking.

Alex McHaddad
La Grande

Understanding legislation takes effort

Maybe you say, "The government is making too many regulations that interfere with running my business the way I want." But really, who makes those decisions?

First, we voters vote for the politicians who we believe will work for us. We contribute to their campaign funds and write to the winners. At the same time, corporations and organizations also contribute campaign funds; how-

ever, with their money, they can hire lobbyists to influence legislation for their benefit. (This is what "Citizens United" is about.)

Much of the time, the lobbyists construct bills and hand them to the legislators who submit them for the decision process. Do you think the lobbyists are promoting and writing legislation that benefits everyone? No, they propose and write legislation to benefit their employers. Do these employers and lobbyists stop to think about the effect their legislation will have on others? Who will benefit if their bill is put into law? Who will be hurt?

What about the bureaucrats, those who work for the government and do the "grunt work" to enable the decisions made by the politicians? Do they make too many decisions? For whom do they make decisions? My experience as a former state bureaucrat is that my job was to do what the politicians assigned me to do. Almost every assignment was unpopular with various segments of the population because people have differing needs and expectations.

My advice to anyone who is unhappy with a regulation is to find out who influenced the passing of the bill that included the problem regulation, who it benefits and why was the regulation included in the implementation of the legislation. What is your representative's position? Did you follow the legislation, and did you inform your representative of your point of view? And why did you vote for or against that representative, and did you vote? So you see, it all circles back to the responsible parties — the voters.

Being a responsible citizen is not easy.

Evelyn Swart
Joseph

Write to us

EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of The Observer editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of The Observer.

LETTERS

The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. We edit letters

for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We will not publish consumer complaints against businesses, personal attacks against private individuals or comments that can incite violence. We also discourage thank-you letters.

Letters should be no longer than 350 words and must be signed and carry the author's name, address and phone number (for verification only). We will

not publish anonymous letters.

Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks.

Longer community comment columns, such as My Voice, must be no more than 700 words. Writers must provide a recent headshot and a one-sentence biography. Like letters to the editor, columns must refrain from complaints against businesses or personal

attacks against private individuals. Submissions must carry the author's name, address and phone number.

Submission does not guarantee publication, which is at the discretion of the editor.

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