



DAVIS CARBAUGH
CARBAUGH'S CORNER

Nobody wins in Gladstone situation

As many are aware, an investigation is underway regarding the alleged racism from La Grande's football team during a state playoff matchup against Gladstone.

The allegations listed by Gladstone players and parents outlined in an article from The Oregonian are appalling, and serious action should be taken if proven true. With that being said, it seems that the narrative is already tilting in the direction that La Grande is guilty, even though the investigation is still ongoing. La Grande has released two statements thus far, neither of which admit to any of the allegations.

This premature indictment on La Grande is creating a difficult situation for all sides involved.

The La Grande School District, Gladstone School District and Oregon School Activities Association are diligently looking into the allegations as a conclusion to the investigation nears. A joint statement released by all three entities on Tuesday, Nov. 16, described solidarity between the schools and looked at ways to mend the relationship between competing sides.

The La Grande School District should be commended for how it has handled the situation, following OSAA guidelines and doing what it can to provide clarity into the situation.

However, the damage has already been done in terms of condemning La Grande's reputation. If the investigation comes back and shows that the players were not saying racial slurs, La Grande's name has already been dragged through the mud. A group of leading Democrats from the Oregon House of Representatives even called out the school and called for action. Again — these are allegations, and the investigation is ongoing.

If the allegations are true, that is a serious issue that the school and athletic program will need to handle moving forward in order to avoid an issue like this ever happening again. However, it seems unlikely that video or personal accounts are going to reveal any major outcomes to the investigation.

Before any action is taken or any names are slandered, the full investigation must run its course to get to the bottom of what happened during that playoff game.

Davis Carbaugh covers news and sports for The Observer. He can be contacted at dcarbaugh@lagrandeobserver.com.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Ab Orton, a referee with OSAA, walks off the field after a game between La Grande and Vale on Friday, Sept. 17, 2021. The OSAA is experiencing a referee shortage as it enters into basketball season, just as it had during football season in 2021.

Coming up short

Referee shortage still lingering heading into winter sports season

By **JEFF BUDLONG**
For The Observer

LA GRANDE — George Gillette isn't blowing the whistle to signal a panic-level problem when it comes to the number of officials who will call prep basketball games for the upcoming season. But he could be reaching for it soon.

The Blue Mountain Basketball Officials Association commissioner has seen a steady decline in numbers for decades, but the impact now is being truly felt.

Last spring's pandemic-compacted five-week season tested officials across the state and the Blue Mountain Basketball Officials Association — which is based out of Pendleton and handles schools from the state line at Milton-Freewater to Boardman and south to Ukiah through Pilot Rock — was no different.

"We were extremely short and we had less than half of what we would normally have during a regular season," Gillette said.

The association usually counts between 45 and 50 basketball officials able to work games in its region, but during the spring that number dropped to 17. It was further pared down to 12 by the end of the season because of injuries or overwork. It led to a situation where games were rescheduled or even canceled.

Gillette said with the varsity and JV schedules of the 13 schools the association is assisting this year, he is trying to cover about 1,200 games. Schools are moving games to different days, trying to find enough officials to work the games, but that only does so much.

Gillette is hoping the number of available officials increases before games tip-off Dec. 1.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

An OSAA referee on the field waits for the second quarter to start in an OSAA 2A state championship match between Heggner and Regis on Saturday, Nov. 6, 2021.

It is not a basketball-specific issue either. Football games were being played on Thursdays and Saturdays in addition to Friday to try to alleviate some of the official shortage.

"Moving games around will help, but most of the schools start games at 3 p.m. and it is difficult to get people to break away and be able to be in a gym and toss a ball up at that time," Gillette said.

Lingering issue

Gillette held his first meeting for this season Nov. 1 and had 25 officials attend, but there is a new problem he is having to

contend with.

"We don't have a lot of lower-level officials, and last spring basically all 16 officials associations in Oregon were short-handed," he said. "The (Oregon Schools Activities Association) allowed the schools to take the level of play at the JV level to the level of play at the JV2 level, which means they did not have to use certified officials to work those games."

Gillette said he is fearful that could happen again this season. It makes it difficult for schools to find individuals to referee the games.

"The biggest issue is liability because if you have an injury there are a lot of things that could come into play on the legal side," he said. "(Certified officials) have training in case of injury, and we know what OSAA policy is."

Other associations across the state are facing similar situations and can rarely send their officials to other areas to cover another associations' games.

Disturbing trend

Referee shortage is not just an Oregon issue but a nationwide problem driven by several factors, Gillette noted. It is a decline 30 to 40 years in the making with older officials getting out for a variety of reasons and no one there to take their place.

"Young people watch games growing up and see people in the stands going crazy, and really question whether they want to go out and subjugate themselves to being treated that way," he said.

Gillette has been commissioner for 24 years, but has been an official for 52 years at the high school level. He began as a 19-year-old and has continued on. Today's athletes graduate and have many other avenues to make money or

spend their time.

"Trying to get people involved is very difficult," he said.

The lack of officials can also have an impact on the court with more games officiated by two-man crews rather than the preferred three.

"Over half our games in the spring had just two-man crews," Gillette said. "That is why peoples' bodies started breaking down when they are working four and five nights a week. It doesn't mean in three-man that you don't run, but it is shorter distances and your vision and focus is greater."

Getting involved

Becoming a certified official begins with a simple click of a mouse on the "Become an official" button on the OSAA website. After choosing a sport, they fill out an online information sheet and the OSAA will reach out to the proper association based on where the individual lives.

For basketball, registration and a fee is required as well as a background check. Individuals watch a video on warning signs when an athlete may have suffered a concussion, and there are six required meetings or at least 10 hours of instruction.

"People also have to take a state certification test that is 50 questions," said Gillette, who said people get three tries at the test.

To officiate at the junior varsity or lower level, people only need to take the test. A varsity-level official must score 75 or better. To qualify for postseason assignments, officials must have three years of experience and score 90 or above.

The latest requirement is to supply a COVID-19 vaccination card or apply for a medical or religious exemption.

SPORTS SHORT

OSU coach says he's not a candidate for Washington job

By **NICK DASCHEL**
The Oregonian

CORVALLIS — As Oregon State football coach Jonathan Smith continues to build his program and have success, Beaver fans aren't the only one taking notice.

Power 5 programs looking for a coach are giving the 42-year-old Smith a long look, too.

Washington fired coach Jimmy Lake on Sunday, Nov. 14, and within hours Smith was prominently mentioned by several media sites as a potential replacement. Smith spent four years at Washington as offensive coordinator prior to his hire at Oregon State in

December 2017.

Smith's name also figures to get some run for other jobs, perhaps even as a dark horse candidate at USC. Under Smith, Oregon State is bowl eligible for the first time since 2013.

Asked specifically about his interest in the Washington job, Smith said he had none.

"This place, what we've got going, I feel confident in our direction," Smith said. "I do think when your name gets out there that's really just a nice compliment to everything we've got going."

Smith said he and athletic director Scott Barnes talk weekly, though it's more about in-season issues than the future. Smith has

four years remaining on his current contract, which was renegotiated following the 2019 season. Smith is the lowest paid head coach among Power 5 schools this season, making \$2.5 million. The final year of his deal pays \$2.9 million in 2025.

If there are negotiations, Smith said it's as much about resources as salary compensation. Items such as a larger assistant coaches salary pool and additional support staff are important to him.

"I want to be able to continue to keep this continuity as much as possible. (Barnes) has been awesome, proactive with that, even before we won six games," Smith said.



Leon Neuschwander/The Oregonian, File

Oregon State coach Jonathan Smith is the lowest paid head coach among Power 5 schools at \$2.5 million this season.