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Opinions mixed on OSAA findings in football investigation

Football team ready to move on after investigation shows racist allegations could not be confirmed

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The result of a recent Oregon School Activities Association investigation lifted a weight off the shoulders of La Grande High School, but opinions are still lingering on the origin of the allegations of racism and where the involved schools go from here.

Following a 4A state playoff matchup on Friday, Nov. 5, 2021, a Gladstone football player and parents accused the La Grande football team of racist remarks throughout the game. After months of speculation and in-depth investigation by a third party, OSAA ruled on Jan. 11 that the allegations could not be verified. The claims did a number on the parties involved,

leaving some entities questioning the process and others just wanting to move on.

“The whole thing has obviously been hard,” La Grande head football coach Rich McIlmoil said. “It’s been hard on me, it’s been hard on our team and it’s been hard on our kids.”

The investigation revealed three findings. Two allegations of racism could not be proved. The third section of the findings noted that an official calling the game identified a Gladstone coach by his race, and the official had apol-

ogized to the coach before the game was over.

Officials association response

Peter Caldwell, commissioner of the Northeast Oregon Football Officials Association, addressed the findings regarding his officiating crew involved in the game.

“In my opinion, the private investigator did a very good job of portraying the fact that nothing really happened,” Caldwell said. “One of the referees did indeed call a coach Black,

but that was because he was the only Black coach on the staff. If they were all Black and there was one white coach, he probably would have identified him as the white coach.”

OSAA’s statement on the findings revealed that the organization is working with the Northeast Oregon Football Officials Association to conduct implicit bias training and the OSAA’s racial equity training. Caldwell said he saw no immediate need for

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CATTLE CONCERNS CONTINUE

Ranchers say situation with Dean ranch cattle damages reputations, jeopardizes future of ranching in county

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — A number of cattle were stranded in deep snow in the Upper Imnaha in late December, prompting a joint rescue effort and raising questions about their care.

Rancher and Wallowa County Stockgrowers President Tom Birkmaier said that Wallowa County ranchers are concerned both for the cattle under their care and their reputations in animal husbandry, not to mention the future of ranching in the county.

Caring for the cattle

“As a whole, ranchers and livestock owners in this county deeply care for the health and well-being of their animals. It is important that we view this for what it is, an unfortunate situation brought on by a combination of mismanagement, poor decisions and challenging weather conditions,” Birkmaier said in a written statement Wednesday, Jan. 19. “As difficult as it may have been, the cows should have been brought out of that country a month or two sooner. Our local cowboys are some of the best. They would’ve assisted the Bob Dean ranch hands and gotten the cows out of there.”

Birkmaier and Adam Stein, another county resident who was instrumental in rescuing the cattle and spotting them from the air, said that at least 29 cows are known to have perished in the deep snows and steep terrain of the Grouse Creek Ranch in the Upper Imnaha owned by Louisiana developer Bob Dean.

B.J. Warnock, who until Wednesday, Jan. 26, was manager at the ranch, said



Adam Stein/Contributed Photo

Bob Dean Oregon Ranch cattle feed on hay brought to them on the Upper Imnaha during the past month by volunteers traveling through deep snows.

in a Jan. 2 email that when he and his ranch hands began gathering cattle in September, there were 1,613 mother cows on summer range, of which 10 were unrecoverable. He said 1,548 Dean Oregon Ranches mother cows were successfully gathered by the ranch crew before the snow. After the snow, 34 mother cows were gathered, of which 26 were Dean cattle; the others were owned by neighboring ranches. Warnock said at that time aerial and ground searches were conducted with the hope of bringing in the remaining 29 cows.

Stein confirmed Jan. 20 that he took Warnock up in his plane approximately Dec. 21 and 27 to look for the missing cattle.

“He talked like he was going to put some people on it,” Stein said. “I think

they had a lot going on at the time. That’s why I got involved because something needed to happen.”

As for the actual number of cattle lost, Birkmaier said that won’t be known until herded cattle can be compared with those listed with the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Stein and Birkmaier agreed that they and other ranchers have been willing to help out.

“In Wallowa County everybody needs to get along,” Stein said. “It looks bad for ranchers. People from the cities think, ‘Why are those cows out there?’”

Stein and Birkmaier said some of the cattle caught in the deep snows had recently calved and were trying to keep their calves alive.

“The nutritional requirements of a

lactating cow with a 1-2-month-old calf are quite high,” Birkmaier said. “The protein and energy requirements are two times that of a cow that is not producing milk. This whole incident was made worse by that fact. The cows just had no fat reserves to draw from and with available forage covered in snow, they literally ‘milked themselves to death,’ in an attempt to provide for their calves. ... Those cows starved to death trying to feed their calves milk,” he said, adding that they got too weak to survive themselves. “They were putting all their nutrition into their milk.”

While a number of the lactating mother cows were lost, Birkmaier said, “Fortunately, many of the 1-2-month-old calves were saved.”

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Offering a beacon of hope

The new Behavioral Health Court helps community members and veterans

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The ornate exterior of the Union County Courthouse includes an illuminated tower clock that radiates like a beacon each evening.

This is fitting, for the courthouse is more than a place for trials and other

legal proceedings. It is also a beacon of hope for those who have lost their way. Case in point: a promising new program for veterans and community members that is run at the courthouse — Behavioral Health Court.

The Union County Circuit Court program, whose participants meet regularly at the courthouse to receive

guidance from a team of professionals, helps those who are facing criminal charges due to actions triggered by conditions they often cannot be blamed for, including post-traumatic stress disorder, which many veterans suffer from.

Those selected for Behavioral Health Court report regularly to a 15-member team that includes counselors, attorneys, veterans

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Dick Mason/The Observer

Kelsie McDaniel, from left, Kara Rudd and Troy Davis, all members of the Behavioral Health Court team, talk during a meeting on Jan. 10, 2022, at the Union County Courthouse in La Grande. McDaniel is Union County’s district attorney, Rudd is with the Oregon Judicial Department and Davis works for the Center for Human Development.

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	26 Low		34/21
	Breezy early		Breezy and chilly

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La Grande, Oregon
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SATURDAY

VISITING THE SNOWSHOE HARE’S LAIR

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