



Andrew Cutler/The Observer, File

La Grande's Logan Williams (2) runs down the center during a match between Gladstone and La Grande at Community Stadium on Friday, Nov. 5, 2021. After months of speculation and an in-depth investigation by a third party, OSAA ruled on Jan. 11 that allegations of racist language used during the game could not be verified.

OPINIONS

Continued from Page A1

repercussions to his specific officiating crew.

"They didn't do anything wrong, so there shouldn't be extra training for just us," Caldwell said. "I don't disagree with the fact that every official and association in the state probably needs to have that training, but to single my association out I don't agree with."

Caldwell also noted that the officials association has not yet been contacted about the training.

Under the spotlight

For the La Grande football team and athletics community, the end of the investigation is a relief after being under suspicion and in the statewide spotlight. On Nov. 12, leading Democrats in the Oregon House of Representatives issued a statement condemning the alleged actions of the La Grande football team.

"I think all of us try to do the best job that we can. For people to judge us and point fingers, I have to laugh because nobody's perfect in this world. When people start pointing fingers, they need to question who they are, too," McIlmoil said. "Unless they know the whole situation,

WHAT IS THE OSAA?

The Oregon School Activities Association is a nonprofit, board-governed organization that regulates high school athletics and competitive activities via athletic conferences in Oregon, providing equitable competition among its members, both public and private. The OSAA is based in Wilsonville.

they probably need to just watch and let the process play out."

The coach expressed no animosity toward Gladstone after the investigation concluded, noting that it's time to move on.

"At this point in time, I just look at it like it is what it is," he said. "Obviously they were disgruntled about something. What that was, I have no idea."

Caldwell differed on this point of view, stating that the allegations against La Grande should be met with repercussions.

"It was very clear that the private investigator found no wrongdoing. For one person to cry foul and make it look so bad for La Grande, the community and my officials is totally wrong," Caldwell said. "Quite frankly, I think that Gladstone School District needs to sanction the parent in one way or another. To make an allegation like that, that's totally false and unfair."

Since the allegations occurred in November, both school districts have

made strides to mend the relationship between teams and schools. Both schools conducted elements of OSAA's S.T.A.R. Initiative, which promotes equality and sportsmanship in sporting events. Prior to the game's cancellation due to inclement weather, both schools' boys basketball teams planned a dinner and shaking of hands at half court before a matchup on Dec. 20. The OSAA findings also stated that both La Grande and Gladstone plan on implementing a point of contact to welcome opposing schools that are visiting home venues for athletic contests. These ideas and more are included in the plans to heal relations between both schools.

"I can say with confidence that we have good kids," McIlmoil said. "We have kids that care about each other and they do respect people's beliefs, ideas and who they are as individuals. Even though people may think otherwise, we do have great kids and families in this town."

HOPE

Continued from Page A1

service providers, judicial employees, law enforcement officers and probation officers. The team develops programs for the participants designed to help them overcome the issues they are facing.

Some of those who will be graduating from Behavioral Health Court will have the charges against them dismissed, and all should be emerging with more stability and improved coping skills, said Union County District Attorney Kelsie McDaniel, the program's founder and a team member.

"We want to give them a new lease on life," McDaniel said.

Behavioral Health Court conducted its first graduation on Dec. 27, 2021. There were two graduates, both of whom made tremendous progress since starting.

"We are so proud of them," McDaniel said.

'The team works together'

The graduates had each come to the courthouse at least twice a month and sometimes weekly for 12-18 months to meet with their Behavioral Health Court team.

They would meet with their team after its members had spent an hour reviewing their progress since the last meeting. Their probation officers would discuss things such as whether they had kept appointments with counselors, attended treatment sessions and taken their required drug tests.

"The team works together to do every-

thing it can to help them," McDaniel said.

Participants in Behavioral Health Court meet with their team in a courtroom in a formal setting, as if they are part of an actual court hearing. The meeting is conducted by Union County Circuit Court Judge Tom Powers, who wears his judicial robe.

Powers reviews the participant's progress and any setbacks. At the end of the session Powers rules whether the week has been a successful one for the participant. A ruling of success means a reward awaits the individual. The participant chooses an item from a basket of small rewards Powers has assembled. Other rewards Powers provides include reducing how often participants must check in with probation officers.

Powers enjoys having the opportunity to encourage participants and provide incentives. He noted that normally when people come before him in a courtroom it is because they are about to be sentenced or are have been charged with a crime, all occasions calling for stern expressions.

"Now I get to be a smiling judge," Powers said.

On the down side, Powers does have to issue sanctions if the participant has had a bad week by missing counseling appointments, drug tests or other assigned tasks. The sanctions he may impose include adding drug tests and check-ins with the individual's probation officer.

A range of participants

Not all Behavioral Health Court participants have drug problems but each must be drug tested to confirm sobriety and to help

with medication management, McDaniel said.

Some participants are new to the judicial system, but others are not. Some have extensive criminal records and are in the program because the root cause of their problem is one the Behavioral Health Court team believes can be solved by the right corrective action. For example, an individual may have been committing crimes because of an addiction to alcohol, which the team believes can be successfully addressed with treatment the individual has not received, McDaniel said.

James Schaeffer, a La Grande defense attorney and a member of the Behavioral Health Court team, credits the program with adding stability to the lives of participants.

"It provides them with structure and the mental health services they need. It is a good alternative," Schaeffer said.

He added that the program not only helps participants but also the community. He explained that when people have issues addressed they are better able to become productive members of society.

Kara Rudd, the Behavioral Health Court's coordinator, is encouraged by how she has seen the program change people's lives for the better.

"It is exciting to see them moving up," said Rudd, who is the Behavioral Health Court Coordinator for Union County Circuit Court.

Rudd is optimistic about the future of Behavioral Health Court.

"It is a very exciting program," she said. "The participants are excited and it is gaining momentum."

CATTLE

Continued from Page A1

From the ranch

On Jan. 18, Warnock said by email that he put in his two-weeks' notice Jan. 12.

Wallowa County Sheriff Joel Fish, whose department is investigating for possible animal neglect, said the Deans brought in a new ranch manager, Katie Romero.

When contacted Jan. 24, Romero said she is from "out of state" and her boss, Bob Dean's wife, Karen Dean, had instructed her not to answer questions from the press.

In a phone call right after that, Karen Dean also declined to comment, saying, "I don't have anything to say to you," before hanging up.

Fish referred questions to the Deans' legal counsel, Joseph Law Firm of La Grande, but no comment was received after numerous emails and voicemails were left over the past two weeks.

Fish said his investigation is continuing and he has not determined if charges will be brought.

Wolves in the mix

Stein said when he again flew over the area where the Dean cattle were he saw signs of wolf predation. He said Jan. 20 that he had seen signs that wolves had dug up cattle that had been buried in the snow.

"I'm sure they were dead before" the wolves came, he said.

He did not see any evidence of wolves attacking live cattle. However, he and Birkmaier agreed giving wolves a taste of beef under such circumstances can whet their appetite for live cattle.

"I think it will have an impact," Stein said. "Typically, when wolves start working on cattle they won't quit."

Birkmaier agreed, saying adding beef to wolves' diet makes it more likely they'll attack cattle.



Adam Stein/Contributed Photo

This snowcat with a trailer on skis was used to move livestock back to where they could be transported by vehicle to safety in recent weeks.

"The problem is that it teaches them to eat beef and that whole area will be attractive for wolves if there's cows out there again," he said. "Elk and deer are their primary diet, but occasionally we have a problem with them attacking livestock."

Birkmaier said he regularly uses nonlethal methods such as noise, light and a human presence to keep wolves at bay. But it isn't always effective.

He said normal losses during the period from April to October — the time cattle are on summer range in the national forests — is usually about 1% to death from diseases or other natural causes. Since the reintroduction of wolves, losses during that time have risen to 3% to 5%, he said.

He said his herd experiences almost zero losses during the winter when they are on his Crow Creek ranchland and under constant supervision.

Ranching community

Birkmaier agreed the Dean ranch had a greater challenge with about 1,500 cattle, but they also have six or seven ranch hands.

"It seems like that ranch had plenty of help," he said. "I know all the workers and they are good hands. I just can't figure out why they didn't get the cattle gathered."

As Stockgrowers president, Birkmaier said he feels a need to speak out for his fellow ranchers.

"So many are telling me (they agree), but they're not willing to step out and say something," he said.

However, many have been willing to help with the emergency, which is now drawing to a close.

"After nearly a month of nightly conference calls, the rescue process is wrapping up. County Commissioner (Todd) Nash set up a conference call-style meeting where volunteers, ranchers and agency persons could set up strategies and coordinate plans for rescuing the cows. It created a perfect platform for the communication that was necessary and was quite effective," Birkmaier said. "We relied so heavily on not only Adam Stein's flying skills, but his ability to snowmobile, groom trails and deliver hay to the cows. He just knows that country so well and usually directed the extraction method that would be the most effective."

Stein agreed, saying there were numerous key players without whom the cattle rescue wouldn't have been possible, and they should not go unrecognized.

"The amount of support from local ranchers and residents was overwhelming," he said. "Thank you all for your assistance."

TEN DEPOT STREET

Open
Fri-Sun
5pm-8pm

"Real Food for the People"
Take-out
Menu
Updated
Weekly

www.tendepotstreet.com
541-963-8766
tendepotstreet@gmail.com



Lose Weight Now, in La Grande

Doddsy from EOActive lost 40 pounds so far



Scan the code to watch Doddsy on video tell his story



James R. Kopp, MD, MBA
Weight Loss Physician

"If you struggle to lose weight and keep it off, come see me. Our program helps men, women, and adolescents lose 10 to 150+ pounds safely, rapidly, and healthfully. Scan the code and watch Doddsy's video. Please call my office, and Kathy will schedule your Free No-obligation Consultation to learn how we can help you too. Then you decide what you'd like to do. I look forward to meeting you."
—Dr. Kopp

Call 541-963-9844

Or visit MetTrimMD.com/LaGrandeOR
to Schedule your Free No-obligation Consultation

MetTrimMD La Grande
907 Washington Ave, La Grande, OR 97850
MetTrimMD.com/LaGrandeOR | 541-963-9844

*Personalized plans. Individual results vary.