

State of the Union as reality TV entertainment

The State of the Union address on Tuesday, Feb. 4, was worthy of a reality television show. It had something for every viewer. It had something for people to hurrah and for others to disdain.

The event started on a startling note when the President seemed to ignore House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's outstretched hand before he began speaking. Did he not notice she was attempting to shake his hand? Did he snub her? It is open to interpretation.

The non-handshake was bookended with the Speaker methodically tearing up a copy of the speech at the end of the president's speech. Pelosi dramatically tore it in half, making a grand gesture on her feelings about the speech she just heard. Explaining her decision to tear up the speech, Pelosi said, "It was the courteous thing to do considering the alternative."

During the address the president announced that he was bestowing the National Medal of Freedom on one of his galley guests, radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh. The first lady then pinned the medal on him.

Presidents routinely invite guests to the State of the Union and recognize them during the speech. One of the other guests this week was a military wife and mother. After praising her and other military families for their sacrifices, the president said he had a surprise for her, then announced that her husband

was back from deployment in Afghanistan. It was moment worthy of The Ellen DeGeneres Show.

The evening was also punctuated with the walk out of four Democratic representatives; each had their own reasons for leaving.

Republican members of Congress applauded many times during the address, especially when the president touted the state of the economy. They gave standing ovations when he touted the low unemployment rate among the demographic groups that historically have high rates.

The State of the Union address is a political statement. The formal basis for the address is from Article II of the Constitution, which says the president, from time to time shall give to the Congress information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient. A president has a lot of latitude on how they do that.

We shouldn't be surprised by a State of the Union address that reflects the president's reality TV background. Reality TV is entertainment and that is what the nation got Tuesday night.

Donald Trump is the president. People may support or oppose his policies and political style, but respect for the office should always be paramount for the people and members of Congress.

—LAZ

our
opinion

the
mind
of matt

The legacy of Kobe

By MATT RAWLINGS

When I was younger, I hated Kobe Bryant.

I didn't actually hate him as a human, I just hated that he would continuously torch my favorite team. As a Portland Trail Blazers fan, Kobe and the Los Angeles Lakers ripped my heart out of my chest more times than I could remember.

Whether it was the infamous alley-ooop to Shaq in Game 7 of the 2000 Western Conference Finals or the impossible game-winning 3-pointer in the final game of the 2004 season, Kobe crushed Blazer fans for the better part of two decades.

Off the court, I was never a fan of Kobe either. He cursed more than any athlete I've ever witnessed. I thought he was selfish and oftentimes a bad teammate.

And no matter how much time passed, I never forgot how he was accused of sexual assault in 2003. Although the case was dropped by prosecutors after 14 months, the situation, at very best, should be viewed as morally abhorrent.

But on the morning of Jan. 26, I cried real tears over a man that I didn't know — and didn't particularly like.

When my little brother texted me that Kobe Bryant had died in a helicopter crash, I didn't believe him. I checked every website I could to see if anyone would refute the report. When the reality set in, I found myself having trouble grappling with my emotions.

It's been nearly two weeks since Kobe, his 13-year old daughter Gianna and seven others lives were taken in a fateful helicopter crash in Calabasas, California. And still, I find myself reading a story or watching a video about Kobe that brings my emotions swarming back. It has caused me to wrestle with why his death, and the deaths of others on board, has affected me so greatly.

Sure, I have good memories of Kobe. I watched him play for almost my entire life. He grew up in front of the world.

I will always remember watching the gold medal game at the 2008 Olympics against Spain with my dad and my brothers and seeing Kobe take over the game, putting USA basketball back in global domination.

I will always remember watching Kobe's final game with my buddy Jordan, and seeing #24 drop 60 on the Utah Jazz as he bid farewell to the game that he had played his whole life.

But the thing is, Kobe's impact, and the impact of this devastating accident, was far greater than Kobe's basketball career.

For more than half of his 41 years on Earth, Kobe seemed larger than life. I believe that's one of the reasons his death was a shock to so many people — it was a reminder how temporary and fragile life is.

Hours after Kobe's death, it was almost surreal to witness what was unfolding on television and social media.

One of the things I admired about

Kobe's post-basketball life was that, being the father of four daughters, he was an incredible advocate for women's sports.

Kobe had visited with the University of Oregon women's basketball team on numerous occasions and developed a particularly close friendship with Sabrina Ionescu — one of the top players in the country.

Oregon was scheduled to play a nationally televised game with Oregon State less than three hours after the death of Kobe. When I saw Ionescu on the verge of sobbing while warming up to play, I too began to weep.

I continued to be teary-eyed when I saw the reaction of a litany of sports personalities trying, and ultimately failing, to hold back their emotions. I cried some more when I thought of the families who would never see their loved ones again, and for Kobe's wife of nearly 20 years, Vanessa, who has to raise three girls while dealing with the loss of her husband and daughter.

But through this tragedy, we were able to see something beautiful.

It's not a leap to say that this country has never been more divided politically. And with the upcoming 2020 presidential election, that division will likely grow more and more.

But I have always believed that sports are the great unifier. And we have been able to witness that over the past two weeks.

On the day of Kobe's death, thousands of people of different races, political ideologies, religions, genders and sexual orientations gathered outside of Staples Center in Los Angeles to mourn the loss of one of their heroes.

About 1,000 miles north of Staples Center, before the Oregon and Oregon State women's basketball teams got set to play in a top 10 showdown in Corvallis, OR. State senior Maddie Washington was the first to walk to the other side of the court to console members of the Oregon team.

Moments later, the two teams were locked arm-in-arm at mid-court, engaging in prayer.

"I know we're supposed to be rivals, but when you see someone in pain, you just want to put your arms around them," Thompson said.

In the coming days, people weren't just mourning the death of their favorite basketball player, they were celebrating the life of a man who inspired them.

Much has been made about Kobe's mantra of having of "Mamba Mentality." What does having a "Mamba Mentality" mean? Kobe put it this way:

"Mamba mentality is all about focusing on the process and trusting in the hard work when it matters most. It's the ultimate mantra for the competitive spirit. It started just as a hashtag that came to me one day, and it's grown into something athletes — and even non-athletes — embrace as a mindset."

"Hard work outweighs talent — every time. Mamba mentality is about 4 a.m. workouts, doing more

than the next guy and then trusting in the work you've put in when it's time to perform. Without studying, preparation and practice, you're leaving the outcome to fate. I don't do fate."

I never thought Kobe was the greatest basketball player ever. But I don't think I've ever seen anyone — athlete or non-athlete — work harder at his craft than Kobe.

The man was a world-class athlete and an absolute artist on the basketball floor, but it was the having the mindset that nobody was going to outwork him was what separated him from the normal star athlete.

It's been well documented that many athletes struggle to adjust to normal life once their career is over. But people close to Kobe claimed that he had never been more content than when he was retired.

Kobe used the "Mamba Mentality" to attack every phase of his life with tenacity, especially when it came to being a father of his four girls.

On many days, I view social media as a toxic cesspool of nonsense. But over the last couple weeks, it's been amazing to see the stories from people — from all walks of life — that were inspired by Kobe.

Even people who didn't follow sports were influenced by Kobe. There were numerous accounts shared on social media of how people used Kobe's motto to get through the suffering and the struggles that life often brings.

I also loved seeing the stories of those who had the chance to meet Kobe later in his life and share how he was humble, how he provided advice and became a mentor to many and how much he loved being a "girl dad."

But through this whole process, I still think about and feel for the victims of sexual assault who may have been traumatized or triggered by this situation.

If anyone like me is having trouble processing their complex and complicated feelings on the death of Kobe, I have a piece of advice.

It's okay to mourn a flawed person — because at the end of the day, we're all incredibly flawed.

I have never been accused of a heinous crime, but I fall short on a daily basis.

Over the course of my 28 years on Earth, I have had bouts of total selfishness. I have lied and I have continuously failed the ones that I love. I sin on a daily basis.

But when I come face-to-face with my own mortality, my hope is that people won't remember my long list of shortcomings. My hope is that, instead, people will remember the times that I succeeded. The times that I served people well and loved with all my heart.

I believe that former NFL offensive lineman Rich Ohrnberger said it best:

"We're all flawed in some ways. Nobody is, or has ever been perfect, but if the sum of your life is worth being modeled after, you've achieved a lot."

Kobe Bryant achieved a lot. (Matt Rawlings is the associate editor of the *Keizertimes*.)

Antidote to winter doldrums

Winter is a time to hibernate, nest, get cozy, stay indoors, where it is toasty and warm.

For those not taking part in snow sports this time of year, the Keizer and Salem area offers entertainment of a more cerebral kind: live theater.

The Salem Theatre Network (STN) is an alliance of 13 organizations that promotes life theatre in the mid-Willamette Valley region. Members of STN include Pentacle Theatre, Enlightened Theatrics and our own Keizer Homegrown Theatre. Each of the theatre companies offer shows with casts that include our friends and neighbors.

These are 13 antidotes to "there's nothing to do around here." Locally, Keizer Homegrown Theatre will kick off its 2020 season on Friday Feb. 14, with *Love, Loss and What I Wore*, by Nora and Delia Ephron, at its theatre in the Keizer Cultural Center. Winter is the weak time for new movies, but a strong time for live theater in the area.

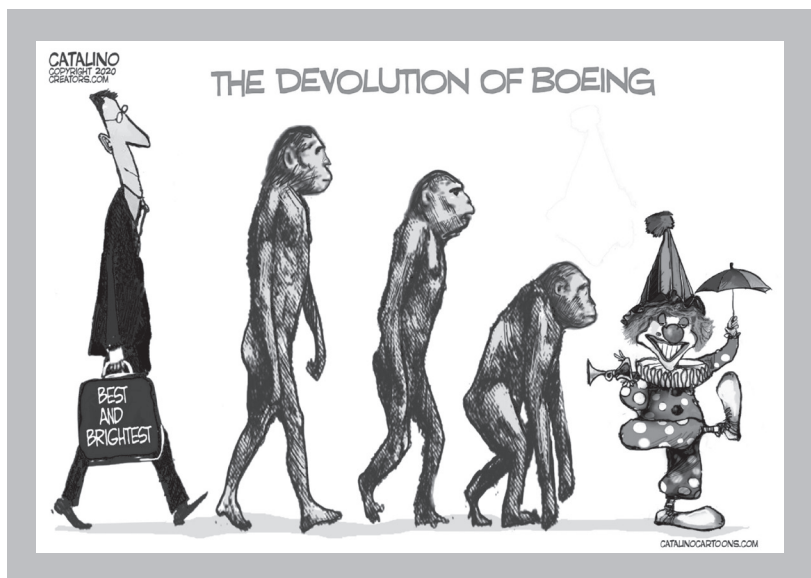
Many first-time theater audiences ask themselves why they didn't

go sooner. The offerings include everything from drama to comedy to suspense, and sometimes musicals. Most times tickets to local theater production are less than tickets to whatever is showing at a cineplex. Aside from the thrill of live theater is the joy of spending less money for an evening's entertainment.

Appearing in the coming weeks are such diverse shows as *First Date*, a musical, staged by Enlightened Theatrics at Salem's Grand Theater; *Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express* at Pentacle Theatre; *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.* at Willamette University's M. Lee Pelton Theatre and *Midsummer*, a play with adult themes at Verona Studio in Salem's Reed Opera House.

Art should make one think, laugh or cry. There are things to do in the Keizer and Salem area in the doldrums of winter and one of those things is live theater, passionately staged by local people who only want to create and entertain.

—LAZ



The little-known origins of Valentine's Day

Why is February 14 celebrated as the day of love? The answer is not that buying cards needed a boost. And there's actually more to the origin of Valentine's Day than just candy, red

Though my younger years were spent in college classrooms where the subject was world history, I do not recall a mention of St. Valentine. Maybe I drifted off on a warm spring afternoon at the University of Oregon when the subject of saints by name of Valentine came up. Fact is, Valentine's Day has its origin in legend. One legend informs us that a 3rd century emperor, Marcus Aurelius Claudius Gothicus, also known as Claudius II, found it difficult to find men to join his army because, he believed, the men around were too attached to their wives to fight wars.

He, of course, chose the "logical" thing to do: he banned all marriages. Yet, Claudius II ignored that one powerful factor that we know motivates humans to move mountains for one another. What's that? You guessed it—love.

Meanwhile, there was a local man by the name of St. Valentine. Valentine viewed the emperor's action as a profound injustice and thereby decided to do something about it. Thumb-

ing his nose at the emperor, he went about the land officiating at the marriage of young couples. Valentine may have hoped to keep his activity a secret. However, when Claudius II discovered Valentine's treachery he had him arrested, beaten and had him hanged.

The more one researches the subject, the more there is to learn. One of the most popular symbols of Valentine's Day is Cupid, the Roman god of love. There's also the tale of another Valentine, a Christian priest, who was jailed for performing miracles. From his prison cell, it's alleged he wrote to a local lady he'd cured of blindness. Legend has it, he signed his letter, "From your Valentine."

The ancient Romans also celebrated the feast of Lupercalia, a spring festival held on the 15th of February whose reported events are too lewd to describe in a family newspaper. With the coming into prominence of Christianity, the holiday moved to February 14. Ultimately, a few hundred years ago, Christians came to celebrate February 14 as a special day in recognition of early Christian martyrs named Valentine.

The custom of choosing a sweetheart on this date spreading throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. Later, Valentine's Day found its way to

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