

OSAA

from 1B

That’s not to say that spectators are being forced to sit silently in the stands. “You can scream and yell all you want,” Johnson said. “Just scream and yell in support of our team. You can do a lot of things to support your team without getting negative. Clapping together, cheering together — If we had 2,000 people in our gym and everybody is screaming “defense, defense” from the bleachers, that’s pretty intimidating. That’s totally great, totally legal. But if I’m yelling ‘You Suck’ every time number 12 gets the ball, that’s not right.

“You’re not going to have less fun at a game because you can’t scream and yell at somebody.” OSAA does not officiate every league game played at schools, spending most of its time at state championships. There will not be extra officers or administrators to patrol the games. “They’re trying to put together something that holds schools, fans and coaches accountable to decorum,” Johnson said. If an incident does occur, it’s incumbent on individuals during the game to report the incident to OSAA, who will then sanction the district. “That’s puts a lot of pressure on our school,” John-

son said. “Sometimes you can’t hear everything. For the most part, the incidents are isolated. For the most part, for the past couple of years, if I walk by and sit by somebody and say ‘Hey, you’ve got to cool it,’ they’re great. They say, ‘You’re right, I’m sorry.’ We’ve had a pretty strict sportsmanship message that said, ‘We can’t get after officials.’ That’s where it stopped for us. However, the specific incidences that could get a school sanctioned is still being defined by the OSAA, which leaves individual schools to determine what is acceptable and what isn’t.

“Obviously, that creates some gray area,” Johnson said. “Coming up with concrete examples is really difficult. There’s a lot of people who feel like yelling ‘airball’ isn’t the end of the world. But I think it’s a piece of a larger puzzle. ... Ultimately, we don’t want to kick people out. We just want fans to understand that there’s a problem, it’s real and people are being affected. This didn’t start in Florence but once the rule is in place, it’s my job to enforce it.

“We are an institution of learning. This is a teachable moment, not just for our students but also for our spectators. I think this will make it a better situation for everybody.”

The regulations are a reaction to multiple incidences throughout the state in 2019, beginning in January at St. Helen’s High School. In that incident, Parkrose High School, which is Oregon’s most racially diverse high school, traveled to St. Helen’s High School for a girls’ basketball game. During the JV game, a group of St. Helens students began hurling ra-

cial insults at the Parkrose players.

“It started with five or six people [in the crowd] at the JV game,” Parkrose High School’s basketball coach Krystal Forthan told Fox News 12 in January. “A few parents heard it and then it trickled over to the varsity game, with me being called a gay ‘N-word.”

“Everyone in the gym could hear it,” a player told Willamette Week, though officials did nothing anything to stop the harassment. It continued out into the parking lot as the team went to its bus for the ride home. St. Helens students made monkey noises and one St. Helens student told a white Parkrose player, “You should be their master, not their teammate.”

“It’s hard to focus when people are calling you the ‘N-word,’ making monkey noises, telling you to cross the border,” Parkrose player Teniya Green told Fox News.

Descriptions of the incident made their way to the state capital, where Portland Senator Lew Frederick labeled the incident as a “bias crime.” Soon after, legislation was introduced on House Bill 340, which made it illegal for school districts to be a member of — or paying fees to — an interscholastic organization, such as the OSAA, unless the organization implements policies that address the use of derogatory or inappropriate behavior that occurs at sporting events. The bill passed both houses with full bipartisan support; zero “no” votes were cast.

The OSAA, which oversees Siuslaw and Mapleton School districts’ sports activities among other districts in Oregon, took action with an overhaul of Sportsmanship Responsibility guidelines for players and officials — with particular guidance aimed at spectators.

In a letter addressed to superintendents, principals and athletic directors, the OSAA explained its decision, pointing out that the incident at St. Helens was not a one-off. During the past year, Oregon schools have experienced the following:

- Youth marched on to a high school soccer pitch carrying a white nationalist flag and called visiting Latina players “beaners” and

“bitches.”

- Players on a football team called opposing players the “N-word” and no coach, official or school staff took any action.

- Fans threw beans on the floor of a visiting team side of a volleyball court; the visitors were mostly Latina.
- Fans at a basketball game yelled “scalp them” when playing against a team from a tribal community.

“These incidents are rising,” Johnson said. “They’re not isolated. They may be rare, but they’re not isolated. If I’m in the house or the senate, I would want to do anything I could do to safeguard the students and to help pass along the people that are going on to watch that they just need to be sensitive to people’s feelings. It’s just not fun when you’re in the scope of anger, and the people who are targeted by that anger have no way of defending themselves. Officials can’t run into the stands. They’re taught to run into the locker room and wait for things to die down, get into the car and get out of town. Think about that. You have to worry about your personal safety because you made a call that people disagreed with.”

For the most part, Siuslaw High School has not had any of the overtly racial incidents that mirrored those cited by OSAA. Which isn’t to say there haven’t been issues.

“Sometimes it’s spectators from the community yelling and getting into the game, which can not only bring down the team that we’re playing, but it brings down our players too — even if they’re not yelling at our players,” Siuslaw Cheerleading Coach Teri Straley said. “Some of the girls have told me that last year when they had members of our community yelling at other teams, it made them feel bad for the team opposing team members. They’re just trying to play the game the best they can.”

Straley said that her squad does not use cheers designed to bring other teams down, saying “We never say ‘B-E-A-T this team.’ We’re just going to cheer our team on because they need that energy. We can do that without bringing another team down.”

Getting spectators to change behavior can be dif-

ficult, as booing opposing teams has been a part of the culture since sports began.

“There was a sentiment a long time ago that coaches and spectators and maybe even athletes could voice their opinion pretty loudly about problems they have with coaches, problems they have with officials,” Johnson said. “When I grew up in the 80s, it was common for us to single out one player on the other team and boo when they got the ball. Or turn our backs on the team when they were being introduced. We would jingle the keys when the game was over and signing ‘Nah, Nah, Nah, Good-bye.’ I think those things were part of the sport, part of the fun. But it’s not much fun to be on the other side of that when you’re losing a contest. So, I think we’re just slowly evolving to a situation where the things that come out of spectators mouths should be supportive of their team only.”

Johnson understands that it’s an evolution that’s going to be difficult.

Spectator sportsmanship is an issue that has been spilling into the professional realm as well, as a recent incident in Utah, where Oklahoma City guard Russell Westbrook, an African-American, was harassed by a fan while playing the Utah Jazz. After a fan yelled, “Get down on your knees like you’re used to,” Westbrook went off, yelling at the fan and threatening him.

Westbrook told reporters that he had received constant abuse when playing in Salt Lake, including an incident when a fan called him a “boy” when he was warming up.

“There’s got to be some consequences for those types of people that come to the game just to say and do whatever they want to say, and I don’t think it’s fair to the players,” Westbrook said.

After the altercation, the fan was banned for life and Westbrook was fined thousands of dollars. While it can be argued that the verbal altercations with professionals is just part of the game, Johnson states that it’s different for students.

“We’re not talking about professional athletes who are 30-years-old and making millions of dollars,” he said. “We’re talking about high school kids and officials who are making \$60 a game to officiate. They don’t deserve to be treated like that. ... And the people on the court at a high school contest aren’t getting paid anything. They’re amateurs. They’re high school students, 14 years old.”

Johnson admits that it can be difficult for some fans to agree to the new regulations, particularly with the passion that school athletics can elicit, and that the new OSAA rules do represent a paradigm shift in school sports — but that, in the end, the rules get down to what is at the heart of high school athletics.

“Maybe it seems silly, but come in with the mindset that you want to enjoy a hard-fought contest and enjoy high school athletics. Nobody’s out to get you, it’s not a conspiracy, nobody’s taking money, coaches aren’t out to get your kids. They just want to play. If you want to support your team, clap when they do something well. Say ‘good job,’ ‘come on, you can do it,’ ‘great play,’ ‘great shot,’ ‘nice hit,’ ‘good defense.’ Those are what they’re looking for. “Just walk in the door and be supportive of your team and don’t treat people with disrespect.”

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