

EDITORIAL

Why waiting is warranted

Something awful might have happened on the football field at La Grande's Community Stadium on Nov. 5.

But based on the scarcity of irrefutable evidence available so far, it seems premature to blithely substitute "did happen" for "might have happened."

The allegation is simply enough explained.

Football players, coaches and parents from Gladstone High School, in a suburb southeast of Portland, say white players from La Grande High School repeatedly uttered racist slurs at Black players from Gladstone during a playoff game.

La Grande officials have not conceded that this happened.

The La Grande and Gladstone school districts, along with the Oregon School Activities Association, which governs high school sports in the state, issued a joint statement on Tuesday, Nov. 16 noting, among other things, that the investigation into the allegations continues and that they are "in close coordination."

The investigation includes reviewing video of the game, and interviewing players and coaches from both teams, along with the referees.

According to The Oregonian, which first reported on the allegations, a La Grande player sent an email to the newspaper, after the original story was published, denying the incidents.

Gladstone players and parents are not alleging a few isolated comments. Ricky White, a senior player who is biracial, told The Oregonian that "it was a problem since the very first play of the game."

Nor are the claims confined to La Grande players.

White's mother, Heather White, told the newspaper that a referee referred to a Gladstone assistant coach as "that Black guy."

Despite the presence of hundreds of players and spectators, most of whom probably had a cellphone or other device capable of recording sound, definitive audio proof of the allegations might be elusive. Words exchanged on the field aren't always audible to fans in the bleachers or to cameras or recorders.

Still and all, if the obnoxious behavior was as widespread as alleged, it seems improbable that no one affiliated with La Grande, or from the officiating crew, would acknowledge, during the investigation, hearing the verbal filth that Gladstone players and parents cited.

A group of leading Democrats from the Oregon House of Representatives, however, apparently require no additional evidence that La Grande players are guilty of what would of course be heinous acts.

In a statement, the legislators wrote: "Incidents like this only reinforce the need for students and adults alike to learn and understand our history and recognize the roles racism and white violence have played since the founding of our nation."

This statement leaves not a smidgen of space for the possibility that the "incident" could be anything but what the Gladstone players and parents described. These leaders apparently find it inconceivable that the La Grande players did not say what they are accused of saying.

There is, of course, no more fertile atmosphere for the flowering of speculation than one in which definitive evidence is absent.

People naturally will wonder, during this purgatory of fact-finding, why the Gladstone parents and players would invent such allegations. And the obvious corollary — why would La Grande players, coaches and the officials refuse to admit saying, or hearing, such things when they would have to know they would be heard by so many others?

Interesting questions, to be sure.

But also essentially useless questions.

They in no way help answer the fundamental question, which is what, if anything, happened?

We will have to wait for that answer.

And we ought to admit that this answer might not be as absolute as we'd like it to be.

There is nothing wrong, to be sure, with lawmakers, or anyone else, talking about what sanctions might be appropriate if the allegations are proved beyond dispute.

If they are, the punishments should be severe. The actions that Gladstone players and parents allege are noxious, and if they happened, it would be reasonable for the OSAA to impose significant punishment, both as a reaction to the incident and, ideally, to use it as a reminder of what can't be tolerated.

But such righteous indignation will not be diminished by the patience required to learn all that we reasonably can about what happened between the sidelines that day.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

Your views

My Christian faith compels me to confront the moral implications of climate change

I'm not a Democrat or a Republican. I'm a Christian.

I believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But I don't believe in climate change. Come to think of it, I don't believe in gravity either.

Why? Because gravity and climate change are just facts of physics — observable, measurable, and predictable — not to be believed so much as understood and respected.

Gravity and climate change are also very consequential. For instance, if I choose not to get out of bed for several weeks, my muscles will eventually shrink until I can no longer stand on my own two feet. So, gravity, if I fail to resist it long enough, will take away my independence. Climate change, if we fail to resist it long enough, will take away our civilization.

Will we resist, or will we retreat?

While my faith doesn't have much to say about physics, it has a lot to say about right and wrong. Unlike gravity, climate change has serious moral implications. We caused it (not natural cycles) — we have known that for over 30 years and yet we are still making climate change worse. Every year the risk increases for you, me, the place we call home, and the people we love.

That is why I went to Glasgow, Scotland, earlier this month to attend the UN Climate Change Conference. I was there to watch and pray as a member of the international Christian Climate Observers Program. I was also there to help launch a movement called #ClimateVigil.

While world leaders gave speeches and delegates attended to tedious negotiations, Christians gathered at a historic church in Glasgow to pray, sing, and light candles. Many more joined us around the world in their churches and homes. It was a global candlelight vigil to show our solidarity in the face of the climate crisis — and our commitment to respond with faith, hope, and love.

You can still experience the global vigil at ClimateVigil.org. You will hear new music from The Porter's Gate Worship Project. You will also hear inspiring messages from Christian leaders, including Katharine Hayhoe, Ruth Valerio and Thomas Schirrmacher.

Still not sure about climate change? You can check the facts for yourself at climatevigil.org/learn. But don't stop there. Consider the facts in light of your most deeply held values. You might even pray about it. That's what I did, and it changed my life. I realized I could no longer look away or sit on the sidelines. I had to make a decision — for the love of God, my neighbor, and my kids.

Love is what moves us. Do we have enough love to get out of bed, stand up, and resist climate change? Or will we pull up the covers and watch the darkness overtake our family and friends? Either way, climate change will be one of the hardest things we ever face. So I say we face it together.

Will you light a candle with us?

Peter Fargo
Baker City

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.
- Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.

- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.
- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

Mail: To the Editor, Baker City Herald, P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814

Email: news@bakercityherald.com

Book brings me back to the summer of 1984

I owned a pair of the original Air Jordan basketball shoes, but at the distance of more than 30 years I can't recall how I managed to acquire them.

Possibly it involved the proceeds from picking zucchini, the most distasteful task for which I've ever received a paycheck.

(Actually it might be the most distasteful task I've been involved with, wages or no wages.)

I do know that the flashy footwear didn't boost my vertical jump.

Which then, as now, is as easily measured with a credit card as with a yardstick.

Not that I expected to acquire even a smidgen of Michael Jordan's prodigious abilities simply by donning his signature red, black and white high-tops.

Hand me a Fender Stratocaster — please, I'd love to own one — and I wouldn't come any closer to replicating Jimi Hendrix's or Eric Clapton's licks than I do now with a much cheaper electric guitar.

(I struggle mightily just to bash out the comparatively rudimentary chords of The Ramones, although even badly played they make a pleasant racket.)

I had all but forgotten those shoes, which I must have scrapped before I went off to college, until my memory was reawakened in the way that it so often is — I read a book.

"Glory Days," to be specific.

Although it's the subtitle that

really explains what author L. Jon Wertheim, a senior writer at Sports Illustrated magazine, was up to with the book published earlier this year.

"The summer of 1984 and the 90 days that changed sports and culture forever."

A bold claim, to be sure.

But over 24 chapters and 294 pages, Wertheim assembles a compelling case for his assertion that this distant summer was littered with milestones whose significance lingers yet, with the 21st century better than a fifth of the way gone.

As I mentioned, I don't remember the particulars of my obtaining my Air Jordans.

It definitely didn't happen in the summer of 1984 — or any other season in that year, come to that.

Air Jordans didn't go on sale to the general public until April 1, 1985, and I was hardly the sort to merit the honor of getting a pair before almost everyone else.

Wertheim's book is the sort of popular culture history that I particularly enjoy, with its relatively narrow focus.

Sometimes an author delves deeply into a single event, or a band or an athlete or a place, and endeavors to explain why that one thing, or one person, was so influential.

Wertheim chooses as his fulcrum point one season, a roughly 90-day period.

Jordan is a key figure — per-



JAYSON JACOBY

haps the key figure — in Wertheim's narrative.

It was an inspired choice.

And not as obvious a choice as it might seem today, when Jordan has long since attained a legendary status rivaled by few athletes from his or any other generation.

In the summer of 1984, by contrast, Jordan, having decided to forego his senior season at the University of North Carolina, was trying out for the U.S. Olympic men's basketball team for the Los Angeles games, and preparing for the NBA draft.

Possibly the most piquant anecdote to illustrate Jordan's relative anonymity then — and certainly the one that resonates most with Portland Trail Blazers fans — is that the Blazers, with the No. 2 pick in the draft, passed on Jordan in favor of Sam Bowie, the injury-plagued Kentucky center.

(The next generation of Blazer fans would gain their own sorrowful story after the 2007 draft, when Portland picked another 7-footer with lower limb problems, Greg Oden, over Hall of Fame shoo-in Kevin Durant.)

Wertheim returns to Jordan several times in the book, between

chapters examining such landmarks from that summer as the rivalry between the Celtics' Larry Bird and the Lakers' Magic Johnson, the dominating performances on the tennis court of Martina Navratilova and John McEnroe, the Summer Olympics in L.A., and the brief resurgence of the Chicago Cubs.

As the book's subtitle indicates, Wertheim doesn't limit his nostalgia to sports.

He also devotes one chapter to "The Karate Kid," a movie I must have seen in the theater that summer although my memory in that regard is as murky as with the acquisition of the Air Jordans. Another chapter focuses on the Jackson brothers' (Michael, of course, being the most famous of the sextet by a country mile) "Victory Tour."

Wertheim deftly sets his main topics against the backdrop of American society, weaving among them brief references to the political and economic situation. Ronald Reagan, naturally, comes up occasionally, as he was that summer in the final year of his first term and campaigning for what would be an electoral rout of Walter Mondale in November 1984.

I was both entertained and educated as I read "Glory Days." For instance, if I ever knew this I had long since forgotten that Dutch, my favorite member of the Cobra Kai dojo in "The Karate Kid" due

mainly to his inimitable neck roll warm up, is Steve McQueen's son, Chad. This fact pleased me far more than it ought to have done.

But mostly I was surprised by how few distinct memories I had not only from that summer, but from the epochal events that Wertheim writes about with precision and eloquence.

I was, to be fair to myself, 13 that summer.

And 13-year-old boys, whatever their attributes might be, aren't as a rule dedicated diarists or especially deep thinkers.

Still and all, I was a bit chagrined to realize how few details I had retained.

And I don't ascribe this scarcity to my failing memory.

I'm certain that I simply wasn't paying much attention to what was going on. This strikes me as passing strange because, as a budding teenager, I had at least an average affinity for sports, music and movies.

I can't figure out what I was so engrossed in during that long ago summer that kept me from forming more specific memories of such events as the Olympics and the NBA draft, the omnipotence of Prince's "Purple Rain" and Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA."

But I'm pretty sure girls were involved.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.