

EDITORIAL

Keeping around 8-man football

On Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021, one of the more exciting high school football games in many years played out on the grass at Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium in Baker City.

But if the Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) makes a change that its football committee has proposed, that thrilling game between Powder Valley and Adrian — Adrian rallied to win 46-38 — might be the last of its kind.

On Dec. 20 the OSAA committee proposed to eliminate the 8-man football format that many Class 1A schools, including Powder Valley, have played in for decades.

The 8-man category would be replaced by divisions of 9-man and 6-man leagues. Larger schools, including Class 4A Baker, would continue to play standard 11-man football.

The committee's proposal would move Powder Valley, along with Wallowa and Joseph, into a 6-man league.

Josh Cobb, the Badgers' head coach, doesn't think much of that plan.

"Eight-man just feels right," he said recently. "I see 6-man as a good thing for schools that truly don't have the student body."

That includes Pine Eagle, Huntington and Burnt River high schools in Baker County, which already play 6-man football. That's reasonable based on their enrollments — Huntington (24), Pine Eagle (53) and Burnt River (20).

But Powder Valley, with an enrollment of 71, and Adrian (79), can comfortably field 8-man squads.

"I don't want to play 6-man," Cobb said. "We have 30 kids on the team."

Although OSAA would allow Powder Valley and other schools slotted into a 6-man league to request a move to a 9-man league, the current 8-man format is working well.

And it's by far the favored format among the schools involved.

Brad Dunten, Powder Valley's athletic director, recently surveyed Class 1A schools in an effort to gather data to be presented at the OSAA committee's meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 5 in Wilsonville.

Of the 95 schools he surveyed, athletic directors or other administrators from 75 responded to a question about whether they preferred an 8-man or 9-man format. Of those, 71 chose 8-man (94.7%).

To the question of whether they would like to continue the current formats, with 6-man, 8-man and 11-man leagues, 85.5% of the administrators said yes. The same percentage of respondents are opposed to the committee's plan for 6-man, 9-man and 11-man leagues.

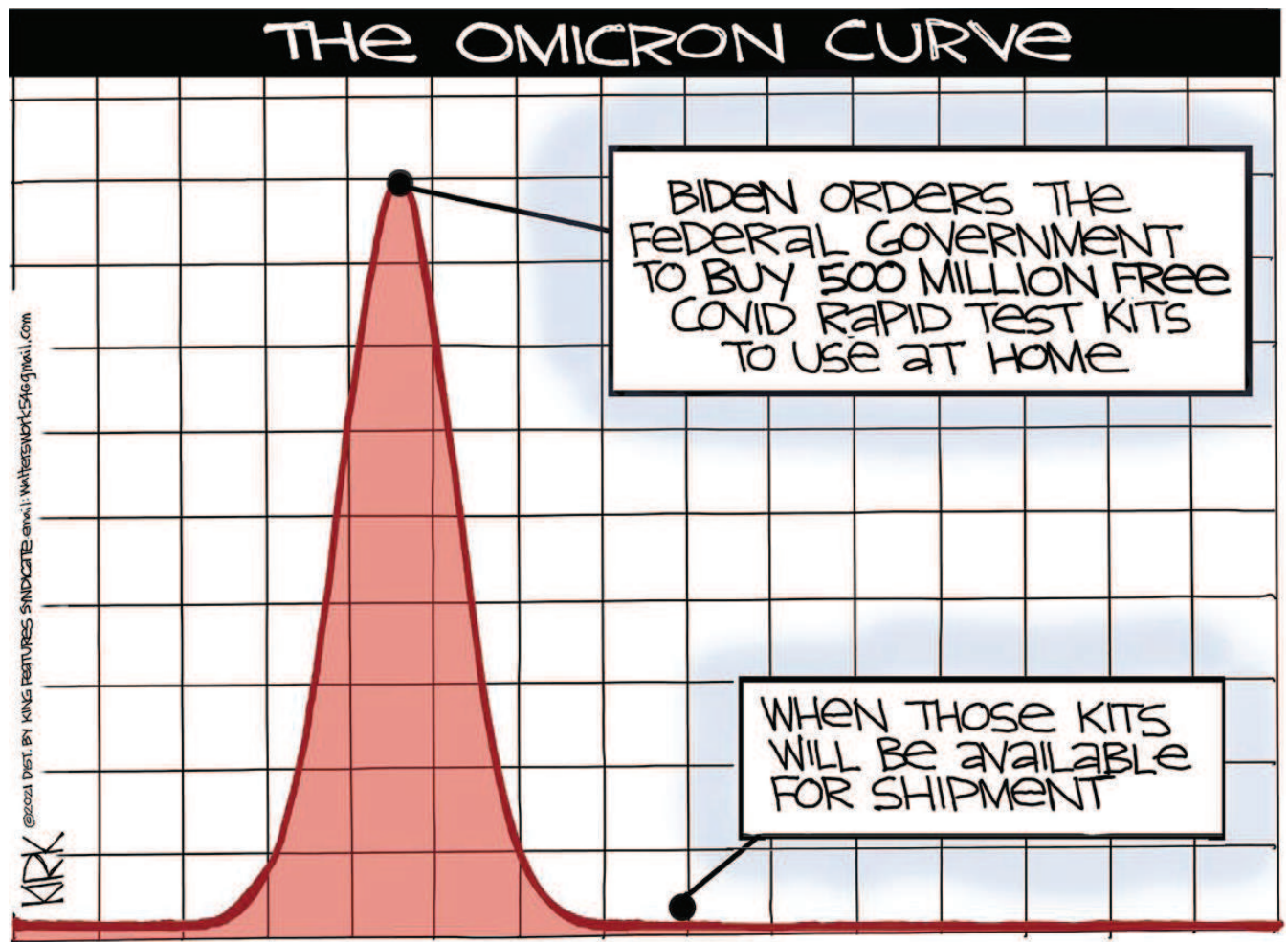
Dunten's survey also asked school officials to list their reasons for preferring one model over another. Responses from those who want to retain the 8-man format included (Dunten's report didn't include the name of the school or administrator):

- "8-man is established, available in surrounding states for scheduling."
- "8-man has a long tradition in Oregon with neighboring states that use the same format. Going away from tradition and what our neighbors use seems unnecessary."
- "8-man has served large 1A schools well competitively, however it would not enhance or provide any opportunities to change course for a 9-man model."

In a Jan. 3 email that includes results of the survey, Dunten wrote: "It seems 8-man football is alive and doing well in the State of Oregon."

Credit to OSAA for trying to make sure that all schools, regardless of enrollment, can field football teams. But the current system, with 6-man, 8-man and 11-man leagues, is meeting the needs of the smaller schools, making possible classic games such as the Powder Valley-Adrian state title contest.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



COLUMN

Signs of light amid the gloom

BY VIRGINIA HEFFERNAN

Nothing keeps sleep at bay these days like huffing up a few articles about democracy's doomsday.

Barton Gellman, America's ranking Cassandra, anticipated "the death of the body politic" in a recent essay in *The Atlantic*. Donald Trump is staging a comeback, Gellman wrote, and crafting ways to subvert the vote if it doesn't go his way. If Trump makes it back to the Oval Office via an epochal cheat, the levees of democracy will indeed have been breached. Injustice will roll down like a mighty stream.

"There is a clear and present danger," Gellman prophesied, "that American democracy will not withstand the destructive forces that are now converging upon it."

Indeed, destructive forces — specifically, my own brain-gnawing panic — reliably converge upon me at 4 a.m. Danger, death, destruction. And, of course, disease. For an extra shudder of pre-dawn dread, I study the hockey-stick surge in COVID cases. A COVID chart and a Barton Gellman audiobook could keep me buzzing on high alert for days on end.

Cassandra, let's recall, was right. But it's also prudent to rest up if we're going to brace for America's Armageddon. So I offer these thoughts for the new year not as a guarantee of hope, but to slow my own insomniac roll. And maybe yours.

First off, there are true signs of light in the gloom.

Americans are back to work, and wages are high. Unemployment in the U.S. is dramatically down, to 4.2% as of last month. The stock market is buoyant, and, in spite of widespread chatter about rising prices, retail sales rose 8.5% year-over-year between Nov. 1 and Dec. 24, according to Mastercard.

Stimulus checks and child tax credits lightened burdens for tens of millions of families. As for inflation, Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC Financial Services Group, predicts it will slow in the coming year.

And don't count American democracy out yet. Trump's Drive to End Democracy is not yet a juggernaut. His promiscuous endorsements of puppet candidates in state and local races, where they could help him overturn election results in 2024, have yielded mediocre results. He is 0 for 2 in congressional endorsements, and many of his other down-ballot darlings are lagging in polls. Even the GOP's big winner in Virginia, Gov.-elect Glenn Youngkin, got there by distancing himself from the Marquis of MAGA.

On V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index, which rates the political freedom of nations on metrics like rule of law and civil liberties, we aren't (of course) hitting the valedictorian marks of freaking Denmark, but the U.S. is still humming along, roughly tied with Japan.

Meanwhile the U.S. Justice Department is, if not devouring the long-running anti-democratic attempt to thwart President Joe Biden and install Trump as our forever president, at least eating away at it.

In Michigan in December a federal judge imposed sanctions on nine Big Lie lawyers, including Trump pit bulls Sidney Powell and L. Lin Wood, over their "historic and profound abuse of the judicial process" expressed in their manic lawsuit to overturn the 2020 election. They could still face disbarment.

What's more, the Justice Department has charged at least 727 participants with crimes related to the Jan. 6 insurrection, and criminally indicted Stephen K. Bannon for blowing off a subpoena from the House Jan. 6 committee. Mark Meadows, another Trump factotum, has been held in contempt of Congress for the same reason. Both men could face prison time.

Then there's the pandemic. A whopping 73% of eligible Americans have had at least one shot of the vaccine. That's compared to, oh, just about 0% last year at this time. What's more, the vax flattened curves for the first deadly variants, and omicron — the one currently laying Americans low — looks to be far less lethal. A recent data analysis published in

Stat News showed "a continuing decline in death rates, despite a radical increase in cases."

None of this is to say the end of the world is not nigh. But our dread may be less related to facts than mood. Psychiatrist Simon Dein argues convincingly in "COVID-19 and the Apocalypse," a fascinating recent journal article, that pandemics inevitably breed apocalyptic narratives. In plague times, religious people are apt to double down on the Rapture, while secular people see sociopolitical or climate-crisis doomsdays. And yet we survive.

So yes, the nation has suffered a huge number of casualties from COVID. And we have sustained a serious blow to democracy with Trump's effort to disenfranchise and defraud us.

But key to those statements is the use of the past tense. We have suffered. We have sustained. British pediatrician and psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott once wrote, "There are moments when a patient needs to be told that the breakdown, fear of which is wrecking his life, has already occurred." Americans need to be told this now.

The process of taking stock of how much we have endured and, despite that, how well we have fared through it all can itself allay anxiety.

Let's be impressed, all things considered. We've home-schooled kids, learned to socialize in masks, endured quarantines and gotten inoculated; we've economized, cared for others, sought and rethought work; we've drawn close to loved ones and consoled the bereaved. We voted in the fairest election in American history — and, in spite of some, um, challenges, we inaugurated a new president.

The breakdown happened, and, as a certain anthem goes, the flag was still there. Sometimes, that minor miracle must be enough to get us through the night.

Virginia Heffernan is a Wired magazine columnist and host of the podcast "This Is Critical."

OTHER VIEWS

Editorial from The Los Angeles Times:

The terrible year of 2020 ended with a glimmer of hope. While the United States and California were in the grip of the worst surge yet of the pandemic, the first vaccines against COVID-19 were being distributed to health care workers and plans were underway for the largest immunization rollout in the nation's history.

At that point, it looked like 2021 would be the year that the U.S. got a handle on the pandemic.

Alas, it was not to be. Too many people rejected the free vaccinations and chose to flout simple infection-control methods like mask-wearing, leaving the door open for the more infectious delta variant. Then, in November, the world was shaken by the emergence of an even more infectious strain of the coronavirus, omicron, which has quickly overtaken delta to become the dominant strain in the U.S.

In the end, more Americans died of

COVID-19 in 2021 than in 2020. Nearly 820,000 Americans have died from the disease, which is considerably more than those thought to have died during the 1918 H1N1 influenza pandemic. And with a second winter surge well underway, the dying will continue into 2022.

But there is some hope as data trickle in about omicron. Early studies out of Britain and South Africa and initial data from U.S. hospitals support what health care professionals have been reporting anecdotally for weeks — that omicron appears less likely than earlier strains to result in serious illness and hospitalization, especially for vaccinated people.

If the data hold, it would be a tremendous relief given that omicron replicates and spreads with terrifying speed, even among vaccinated people. And it could mean that the coronavirus is on the path to a mild, endemic state that would put an end to the pandemic.

Now, here's where we temper this sliver of hope with stark reality. Even if omicron is just half as lethal (as some data suggest) it is still quite deadly — just not as much as we feared. And even if it's relatively mild for many of those who are fully vaccinated, tens of millions of Americans remain unvaccinated, including children under 5 who are not yet cleared for COVID-19 shots and whose numbers are increasing in hospitals.

It's nice to have a tiny bit of good news as 2022 begins in another round of canceled plans and overtaxed hospitals. We should use this occasion to double down on public health protections, such as placing vaccination and testing restrictions on domestic air travel, and to increase vaccination and booster shots. The pandemic may not be over, but it's possible that with effort, 2022 may really be a better, less deadly year.

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Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

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