

Vernonia High School basketball team was able to play at Gaston

By Zack Palmer, of the News-Times. Reprinted by permission

Vernonia reeling after last week's flash flooding, Gaston



Jason Weller, a junior at Vernonia High School, on the basketball court at Gaston on Friday, December 7. With Vernonia's schools all damaged and made uninhabitable by the recent flood, it was uplifting to have the team be able to play this game. Practice on Thursday was held at Pacific University. Photo courtesy of the News-Times.

residents showed their support by donating the proceeds from Friday night's basketball game to a school and community in need.

According to Gaston High School athletic director Tim Olietti, the decision to turn Friday's basketball doubleheader with Vernonia into a fundraising event for the neighboring community was a "shower moment" — the sort of epiphany that pops into one's head without warning.

"I was just standing there and I thought, 'Man, we should really do something for them,'" Olietti said. "If we're going to play, the least we can do is make them feel welcome — and not just say welcome, to actually do something. I'm not really into lip service."

So when Gaston played host to the Loggers on Friday, Olietti opened the gates — the cost of admission was simply a donation to Vernonia High School, which was ravaged by last week's flooding of the Nehalem River. Some fans paid the normal admission price, others paid \$20. One anonymous fan dropped a \$100 bill into the coffer.

"I was very pleased," Olietti said of the \$595 raised at the gate — about six times what Gaston typically takes in at a boys and girls basketball doubleheader. "I didn't know what it would come to and it didn't really matter. We just wanted to do something to help."

Just getting back on the bas-

ketball court after last week's events would have been enough for many involved with the athletic program at Vernonia.

"Right now we're just working on getting these kids a little sense of normalcy," said Vernonia athletic director Gordon Jarman. "Playing that game was very therapeutic for those kids. It was good for them to get their minds off everything else that's going on."

Friday's game almost didn't happen. Jarman called Olietti on Wednesday morning and left a voice mail saying that they would probably have to cancel the game in light of the flooding. When Olietti called back later in the day, however, Jarman had gotten the blessing of his two basketball coaches and was ready to play.

"I wanted to check with the coaches first and see how many kids were directly affected by the flood," Jarman said. "After talking to them, they said if we could get a practice facility lined up for Thursday they thought we should try to play."

A staff member with connections to Pacific University made a few phone calls and the Loggers rolled up in a caravan of buses on Thursday afternoon to practice at Pacific Athletic Center. The next night, Vernonia's four basketball teams (two JV and two varsity) were back in action against Gaston.

"I didn't know about until after the game, but apparently

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