

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

# LINCOLN VS. CATHEDRAL: IT'S BIGGER THAN JUST FOOTBALL

Reform is hard. It can't happen when people on the two sides of an issue are dug in, defiant and defensive. There must be a willingness to find common ground — even if it's not an exact meeting in the middle.

I've written a lot lately about the idea of finding common ground, which seems imperiled. Mask and vaccine mandates have certainly put it to the test.

In schools, matters of race and ethnicity have created deep (and deepening) chasms. We saw it in Coronado earlier this year, when fans of the Coronado High School basketball team tossed tortillas at their opponents following a hard-fought game.

The supposed celebratory gesture garnered attention (and no shortage of anger) from around the country.

To many, it appeared to be a taunt. Coronado is a wealthy, White community; the other team played for Orange Glen High School in Escondido, where 80 percent of the student body is Latino. Coronado's division regional basketball championship was revoked.

And just recently, Lincoln High School head coach David Dunn announced that his football team wouldn't play their scheduled game against Cathedral Catholic High School.

The decision stemmed from a controversial social media post that surfaced in April following last season's matchup. It showed Cathedral student athletes wearing T-shirts that said "Catholics vs. Convicts III" with the caption, "We run the city." Others flashed what appeared to be a gang sign.

The phrase on the T-shirts dates back to a 1988 college football game between Notre Dame and the University of Miami — a play on Notre Dame's Catholic image and Miami's notoriety, after several team players had been arrested and lost their scholarships.

It's telling that the slogan has endured, more than 30 years later, despite the anger and outrage that it caused. Dunn, his players and the Lincoln High School community had a similar reaction to the shirts. Lincoln students are predominantly Black and Latino and come from low-income families.

Following an investigation of the April incident, the San Diego City Conference (SDCC) sanctioned Cathedral's athletics program. The school was placed on probation through the 2022-23 athletic season. Some students were suspended. In addition, Cathedral was instructed to implement restorative justice and diversity education for its entire athletic program and to submit regular progress reports to the SDCC.

In his letter regarding the cancellation (which resulted in a forfeit for the Lincoln team), Dunn acknowledged the efforts made by the Cathedral community to connect with Lincoln's coaches and faculty, but said the efforts didn't go far enough. Dunn wrote, "More deliberate intentional efforts to combat racism are warranted. Combating racism and anti-blackness takes daily, intensive inner work and systems change."

Coaches for Racial Equality is a San Diego-based group of coaches, athletes, parents and officials who gather biweekly to discuss racism and social justice in sports. Dunn joined their vir-

tual conversation on Oct. 27, two days after his letter went public.

Dunn told the group, "We are tired of being treated unfairly — unjustly — and thinking that everything's going to be OK. You can't put a timeline on healing." The decision, Dunn said, was bigger than football: After talking to his team members individually, he knew that Cathedral's behavior had deeply affected their mental health. And so, Dunn had to stand up and say something, thinking that the matter wasn't properly addressed.

Amid the discord, the coach recalled his own experiences, growing up four blocks from Lincoln High. As a 9-year-old budding footballer, Dunn was told that when he played in certain places, he would be treated differently, stepped on and called names. He was instructed to "deal with it" and not retaliate. Dunn asked, fairly, "How do you process that as a 9-year-old?" What is the effect, if you accept what's unacceptable?

Dunn has spoken similar words of caution to his 9-year-old grandson, 40 years later. Still, he

is optimistic that there's a path forward — a way to get things fixed. It will start with a conversation between Dunn and Sean Doyle, Cathedral's head coach.

More than diversity training — which is certainly a step in the right direction — it's dialogue that can foster healing and lead to systemic change.

The Coaches for Racial Equality conversation was moderated by Michael Brunner, a former college and pro basketball coach who led the Jackie Robinson YMCA for 22 years. I asked Brunner what it would mean to "get things fixed" in high school sports.

All coaches would do the right thing, he said, when it comes to matters of race. So would the players, fans and officials. But first things first, Brunner added: "The victim must be made whole."

There it is. Reform is hard.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com.

## PIECE

FROM B1 morphed. ... Every time a person would grow up, the mini land or vert ramp would kind of grow up with them.

"Everyone had their own museum of glamour and glitter and just what made them. They throw their own embellishments onto the ramp and that made it change for everyone else, the next generation to come," Wettstein said. "Everyone had a different way of making it into their own and every day it's different because someone new is on it."

Wettstein had skated the park's former 13-foot vert ramp nearly every day. After the YMCA cut it down due to disrepair in 2019, the family explored building a ramp in their backyard, allowed on a temporary basis by the homeowners association for her lead-up to the Olympic games.

"We built the backyard ramp because it was sort of the missing piece of furniture in our backyard that we could tinker around on," said Wettstein of her yard, that is also home to their blue skate pool named The Iguana Bowl.

Named The Garden Ramp, Wettstein said the ramp became a sanctuary where so many people could have the times of their lives on it.

"You find so much meaning in wood and wheels because it was handcrafted for you to craft something else on it," she said. "The best part of reconstruction is building artwork for an artwork to be presented on it. There's nothing that's really consumed in skateboarding ... you're innovating, reincarnating always, never taking something away without giving it back again."

The ramp was created originally by Christian Dunn and was disassembled by Aaron Astorga. A team from Jim Bell Skateboarding Ramps is reassembling the ramp piece by piece and then it will be finished with a Skatelite top resin. Jim Bell, who has built many ramps for Wettstein over the years, estimates it should be skatable by early November.

Wettstein said she could think of no better home for the ramp than the YMCA, where she found an alternative family and grew so much as a person and skater.

"A ramp pertains to so much more than just this hunk of wood," Wettstein said. "It's more like your whole being slated up from the ground. And when you have a being that's so beautiful like that, the more that you can give it to a place that made you who you are, the more you can realize it has the power to transform and transmogrify everybody else to find who they are too. It's



KAREN BILLING U-T COMMUNITY PRESS

**Bryce Wettstein, who has been skating at the Magdalena Ecke Family YMCA Skate Park since she was 6, donated the vert ramp she used to train.**

the most beautiful thing."

Wettstein is full of reflections on how she has changed in the last two years leading up to this summer's Olympics: "refurbished, varnished and polished."

"What's changed about me now is I almost have more to say," she said. "It's hard for me to not talk, being in this world."

In her Olympic experience, Wettstein was the only Team USA member to make it into the women's park skateboarding finals on Aug. 4. The competition was

almost like a reunion for a worldwide skateboarding family — Wettstein has known the gold medalist Sakura Yosozumi of Japan since she was 12, silver medalist Kokona Hiraki of Japan since she was 14 and the bronze medalist Sky Brown since she was 9.

She endeared herself to viewers with her creative trick combinations like the body varial disaster and by putting her personality on display. She was a million percent Wettstein, strumming a ukelele during her in-

troduction at the finals, cheering for the competitors from every country and memorably helping to lift up Japan's Okamoto Misugu when she fell on her last run and finished just off the podium.

After falling in her third run, Wettstein playfully treated spectators to extra bonus tricks: "She just loves skating," the announcer said. "It's hard to get her out of the park now."

On that hot day, she and one of her best friends, Poppy Olsen from Australia,

finished back to back in fifth and sixth place respectively.

Currently, Wettstein is playing for the 27-8 San Diego Academy volleyball team in the CIF playoffs.

She goes on surf sessions with her mom, dad and 10-year-old sister, finding a form of meditation out on the ocean.

She is thinking of a return to surfing competition and said she hopes to go for a second skateboarding Olympics in Paris 2024.

Pre-Olympics, Wettstein won a bronze medal in park at the Summer X Games and post-Olympics, she won a silver medal at Tony Hawk's first-ever Vert Alert contest in Salt Lake City, one of her first professional vert contests. Held in partnership with Vans, the contest happened to feature a ramp that traveled all the way to Utah, from where else but Hawk's warehouse in Encinitas.

Encinitas, as the Olympics proved this summer, remains a mecca that skateboarders are drawn to and Wettstein is not surprised.

"Almost sort of everywhere you go it's magic," Wettstein said of her hometown. "Encinitas can complement anybody because there's so much here that you can start with. There's a lot of beginnings here."

Billing writes for the U-T Community Press.

## COUNCIL

FROM B1 oppose and object to any new taxes, charges or fees imposed by SANDAG on motorists to use our local roadways."

SANDAG's transportation plan is intended to serve as a blueprint for how San Diego County residents will get around over the next three decades, said Coleen Clementson, the agency's regional planning director. SANDAG's board of directors, which includes elected officials from the county's 18 cities and the county, including Escondido, is scheduled to vote on the plan at its Dec. 10 meeting.

"This is a bold transportation plan for the San Diego region," said Clementson, that is meant to serve future generations and deal with such issues as freeway congestion, climate change and equity. "It is a big

investment. It costs money to do this."

The plan includes such elements as a new rail line, managed freeway lanes for high-speed transit and carpools, and a proposal to eliminate all fares for public transit by 2030. SANDAG also must provide a funding plan, which includes a proposed sales tax increase approved by county voters, and the per-mile fee for drivers.

"This is becoming a modern way to fund transportation infrastructure and ongoing operations and maintenance of that infrastructure," said Clementson of the proposed road-usage fee, which would also start in 2030. "You're paying for what you use."

Much work remains to be done before any elements of the transportation plan are finalized, she said. It is not clear whether voters would need to approve the road-usage fee, which Clementson said would depend on

whether it is classified as a fee or a tax.

Current plans call for a 4-cent per mile usage fee, half of which would go to the state. California now has a pilot road-usage fee program under way, and such fees are included in transportation plans in Los Angeles and Sacramento, she said.

At Wednesday's council meeting, McNamara and Martinez said the proposed resolution was premature as details of SANDAG's transportation plan have not been finalized. McNamara said the Dec. 10 vote, if the plan is approved, will simply authorize the agency's staff to fully research the proposals.

"I ask my colleagues to suspend this for now, and give SANDAG staff a chance to do their work before we try to kill it," McNamara said.

Martinez faulted the proposed resolution because it

fails to offer any alternatives for meeting the region's transportation needs, as well as its language.

"I don't find it to be accurate language, it's emotionally charged and a resolution to kind of rile people up. I'm about solutions," Martinez said.

But the arguments failed to sway the council majority.

"We have paid for these roads with blood, sweat and tears," said Morasco. "Whether you call it a user fee or a tax, it still means the same thing to the bottom line of families, their wallets, their bank accounts."

"If this message does nothing more than let them know the citizens of Escondido, and the council that represents them, are concerned about the ongoing SANDAG overreach, then this resolution is worth it," Morasco said.

Garcia said he was most concerned that low-income residents would be hard-

pressed to pay a per-mile fee for using the region's roadways.

"An impact such as something like this would be catastrophic to them," Garcia said.

Inscoe said people are already dealing with inflation on the prices of everyday items as well as high housing prices that force some to drive 60 or more miles to work each day. The proposed mileage charge and sales tax increase would burden those who can least afford it, she said.

"I don't like where I see this is going. And I really have to support very much this resolution this evening, we owe it to our residences, our businesses, the students, visitors, everyone who comes in and out of Escondido every day using our local roads," she said.

Public comments to the council also were mixed regarding the SANDAG plan. Greg Huskey wrote in an

email, "It's unjust that you would tax an already overburdened citizenry, especially for the purpose of mass transit projects that serve so few."

But Laura Hunter, who addressed the council in person, said it's unfair people like her who own electric vehicles don't help pay for road maintenance because they don't buy gasoline and therefore don't pay the gas tax. The road-usage fee would be both more fair and better for the environment, she said, adding that the program can be designed so the burden won't fall disproportionately on low-income residents.

She urged the council to wait until the plan is further along before taking a stand.

"I would hate to see you reject it out of hand and not have a role in shaping and tailoring that program in the future," she said.

Tash is a freelance writer.

## SMOLENS

FROM B1 Peterson said, "it's an important time in our party's history and we have the opportunity to talk about the failed policies of California Democrats. And we have the opportunity to give people an alternative so that we aren't just the party of 'no,' but we're actually out there talking to people, trying to figure out what their problems are and what's the best solution to them."

Then-San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer and others began publicly pushing the party in that direction in 2017.

That wasn't easy, given that then-President Donald Trump was soaking up the attention of the political world. And embracing Trump remains good politics in some of the state's heavily Republican areas, though not in swing districts.

Regardless, in 2020 Re-

publicans won back four of the seven California congressional seats they lost to Democrats in 2018. How much any change in party focus or tone had to do with that is open to question. Each election is different and, after all, Trump drove a lot of Republicans to the polls.

Yes, Republicans took a beating in this year's recall election. But even though Gov. Gavin Newsom's forces claimed from the start the recall essentially was an attempted coup by Trump supporters, polls at one point narrowed to the extent that his removal from office seemed a real possibility.

The top Republican replacement candidates at the time, Faulconer and Rancho Santa Fe businessman John Cox, focused on tax cuts, homelessness and crime, and accused Newsom of mismanagement. Then conservative radio talk show host Larry Elder got in the race.

He became the frontrun-

ner, which left no doubt that staunch conservatives are still the party's core voters. Faulconer ended up finishing a distant third.

Elder's strident views and alliance with Trump were gifts to Newsom, who teed off on the candidate's opposition to gun control, abortion and COVID-19 mandates, along with his controversial comments about women.

GOP party leaders were behind Faulconer, whose moderate and pragmatic image is not much different than Youngkin's. Faulconer pretty much underscored that on Tuesday.

"Big congrats to Governor-elect in Virginia!" he said on Twitter. "This win shows good, common-sense Republicans can win across our country — even in blue states — when we focus not on divisive national politics but instead listen to voters and provide solutions tailored to our communities."

There are caveats galore in suggesting the Virginia results foreshadow forward

movement for California Republicans. For one thing, Newsom arguably is stronger politically after crushing the recall. For another, by the nature of the office, candidates for Congress have to talk about national issues, divisive or not.

Further, California has been increasingly trending deep blue for a long time. Virginia turned Democratic more recently, but flipped back to Republican on Tuesday.

A lot of post-election attention was paid to Youngkin's focus on education and his contention that parents should have more of a say in what is taught. That may resonate in California. But included in that "parents' rights" approach was opposition to critical race theory and other racially-tinged issues. That could backfire in some California districts.

Democrats are back on their heels right now and not just because of losses in Virginia and elsewhere. The bulk of the news about

Democrats these days has to do with their months of infighting over President Joe Biden's "Build Back Better" budget plan and at times it seems like they're getting nowhere. That's not a good look.

But if they get over that hump, Democrats can go into the election year talking about policies they enacted to combat climate change, create jobs, improve health care and help families in several ways. Meanwhile, they can highlight Republican opposition to those programs and press GOP candidates on where they stand regarding the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and other controversial issues.

It doesn't appear Democrats can simply fall back on Trump's looming presence to fire up Democrats, independents and potential cross-over Republicans. Other than a few comments, Trump stayed out of the Virginia's governors race.

But he isn't going any-

where and Republican leaders in California and elsewhere have no control over whether he decides to insert himself in next year's elections.

All that aside, the party out of power in Washington often racks up substantial gains in Congress during midterm elections. It won't take much for the Republicans to retake control of either the House or the Senate.

It seems they'll be working the kitchen table to try to do that.

### Tweet of the Week

Goes to Tim Sullivan (@TimSullivan714), sports columnist at the Courier-Journal in Louisville, Ky., formerly with The San Diego Union-Tribune.

"Aaron Rogers may not be in the running to be the permanent host, but he appears to be more than willing to place others in Jeopardy."

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