

Racial comments directed at BSU player draw ire

Officials admonish fans' inappropriate behavior at game

By Halley Griffin, Daily News staff writer

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University of Idaho officials are taking another look at the behavior of Vandal sports fans after unruly conduct at a recent basketball game prompted both university and statewide complaints.

Students and staff reported the use of racist epithets by Vandal fans at last Thursday's basketball game against Boise State University.

Offensive terms for Hispanics and illegal immigrants reportedly were shouted at one or more members of the BSU basketball team, including "dirty Sanchez" being shouted at opposing player Mark Sanchez.

The complaints prompted College of Law Associate Dean Richard Seamon to write a letter to UI officials Friday, urging them to condemn the behavior and take action to prevent further incidents.

"I do not know whether I am more angry about the students' behavior or about the lack of any official response," he wrote. "I accept that many of our students need education in what is, and what is not, appropriate. (Thursday) night we missed a critical opportunity to provide that education."

UI President Steven Daley-Laursen responded with a memo to "the Vandal community" Sunday morning, telling students, faculty and staff that he had contacted BSU President Bob Kustra to apologize on the university's behalf.

"These were acts of hate - ugly, outrageous and utterly unacceptable," he wrote. "Despite the happy outcome of the game for our student athletes, athletic staff and Vandal fans everywhere, our Vandal pride was partly diminished when we heard of these events from concerned and offended fans. We have no tolerance for this kind of behavior."

UI Dean of Students Bruce Pitman said fan behavior was unacceptable, both from students and others.

"I think passions were particularly strong because it was Boise State," Pitman said. "We don't experience that level of rowdiness generally at other basketball games, but we are concerned about fan behavior."

In addition to the alleged racial slurs, the crowd used profanity, and one fan "flipped off" a camera that was broadcasting the game back to Boise, UI Athletic Director Rob Spear said.

Spear and Pitman said they received complaints about the gesture from fans who watched the televised game.

In keeping with WAC requirements, UI athletic officials read the sportsmanship policy before each home game. Spear said they will consider re-reading the policy at halftime as well.

"It's really about educating our students," Spear said. "We want to have a balance. We want to create an environment that is difficult for the opposing team to play in, but we want them to do that in a tasteful way."

Western Athletic Conference Commissioner Karl Benson said it is the responsibility of UI game management to enforce the sportsmanship policy.

"A year ago at this time, we sent out a directive that reminded our schools that if there was profanity or racial or sexist comments that we were instructing our officials to call a technical foul on the home team if it didn't stop," he said. "That we stop the game, issue a warning, and if it continued, that a technical foul would be called."

Benson said a "choreographed chant," such as the one directed toward Sanchez, is a violation of the WAC sportsmanship policy and would have been worthy of a foul.

Pitman said that in addition to instructing students on good sportsmanship UI officials also will work with event staff to police game behavior.

"I think that there is a certain level of excitement and rowdiness that comes from being at athletic events, and we don't want to hamper the enthusiasm or spirit," he said. "Athletic events should be an expression of who we are, be an expression of good character, good sportsmanship, good competition."