

# Better late ...

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

CHEERS ... to University of Idaho football coach Paul Petrino. File his decision to cut senior wide receiver Dezmon Epps from the Vandals team under the heading "late, but better late than never."

It took more than Epps, a talented but troubled player, to taint the UI's brand, of course. For that, you can credit Petrino and UI Athletic Director Rob Spear - who bent the rules on behalf of their talented player.

As the school year opened, Epps and cornerback Isaiah Taylor were caught on video shoplifting about \$370 worth of clothing from the UI VandalStore. It was Petrino - not the players - who returned to the store with the merchandise. The case was dropped in favor of sanctions under the UI student code of conduct. After stonewalling for weeks, the UI eventually released the video - which implicated the two players.

Taylor got dropped. But Epps - who'd already got a second chance after piling up an earlier record of drunken driving, driving without privileges and petty theft - got his third chance. He'd play against Ohio, a game the UI hoped to win, and sit out the appearance against USC.

Then came Oct. 25, when Epps was accused of slapping a woman and pushing her up against a wall at Stubblefield's Bar in Pullman. Saying he had "zero tolerance for any inappropriate behavior toward women," Petrino placed Epps on an interim suspension.

Even as Whitman County prosecutors dropped the case last week, Petrino remained firm. Epps had no business being in the bar, he said.

No more second or even third chances. The suspension stands.

"When things happened with Dezmon earlier in the year, he had some very strict restrictions on what he could and couldn't do," Petrino said. "And one of those things that we talked about that he was not able to do was to go out, and he was out that night."

JEERS ... to Idaho Board of Correction Chairwoman Debbie Field. Senate Democratic Leader Michelle Stennett of Ketchum this week asked a good question: Why is Field's agency still doing business with Corrections Corporation of America?

Idaho is paying CCA \$55.17 a day to house up to 750 inmates at its Kit Carson Correctional Center in Burlington, Colo. Last year, your taxes paid CCA about \$4.6 million.

Granted, Idaho has more inmates than beds. There's no more room in the county jails.

But here's the record:

For years, CCA's mismanagement of the Idaho Correctional Center outside Boise set the bar for inmate-on-inmate violence. It became known as the "gladiator school." The place was so understaffed that a federal judge issued a contempt of court ruling against the contractor.

When it turned out CCA had billed Idaho for phantom employees who were never at the prison, it became too much even for Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter. His appointees on the Board of Correction sent CCA packing and eventually transformed ICC into a state-managed prison. Even so, the board allowed CCA to slip away by paying an inadequate \$1 million settlement - and Otter's appointed head of the Idaho State Police, Col. Ralph Powell, never carried out a requested criminal investigation.

Then, on its way out the door in 2014, CCA left the prison without a functioning communications system and inadequate supplies of medicine.

If Field's agency is willing to ignore that recent history and continue doing business with CCA, what's to stop it from bringing the contractor back to create another "gladiator school" when memories begin to dim?

CcHEERS ... to Lewiston City Councilor Bob Blakey. Tuesday, he took another shot at settling Nez Perce County's lawsuit against Lewiston's urban renewal program.

Certainly Blakey, the council and the Urban Renewal Agency are under no pressure to do this.

After all, the jurist who will preside over a Jan. 8 summary judgment hearing hardly offered the county much encouragement. Two months ago, Senior Judge Steve Verby said: "I am troubled by some of the allegations in this complaint, and whether legally, when a decision has to be made as to the validity of those claims, that the county will prevail."

Nor are the politics of this case going the county's way. Taxpayers are being hit for both teams of lawyers - with the price tag now approaching \$150,000.

If they decide to take it out on someone, it won't be the city councilors and URA board. Lewiston's incumbent councilors are all safely re-elected. None of them will face the voters for two years.

On the other hand, Commission Chairman Douglas Havens and Commissioner Doug Zenner are up for re-election next year. Voters may want to press them about why they turned down an early peace feeler.

This summer, the city and the URA suggested closing down the North Lewiston renewal district immediately, completing work on the Nez Perce Terrace Drive extension and then closing that district - and handing over close to \$400,000 in deferred property taxes to the county.

Havens and his board then expanded their lawsuit to include downtown projects.

Blakey's latest offer would have the two sides sit down with a trained mediator - possibly a retired judge - to work out a deal.

Yet, according to the Tribune's Joel Mills, Havens appeared cool to the idea.

Why?

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. Otter. Riddle us this, Batman: Why would any Western governor want his state subjected to the vagaries of the Endangered Species Act?

Remember the spotted owl?

How about the salmon-steelhead controversies?

Yet Otter told The Associated Press he would have preferred having the sage grouse listed as an endangered species.

Idaho's litigious chief executive was the first - and so far only - governor to file a lawsuit against Interior Secretary Sally Jewell's plan to protect sage grouse short of a formal listing. People as diverse as Wyoming Republican Gov. Matt Mead and Montana Democratic Gov. Steve Bullock worked with her because they know - as Otter should - that a formal ESA declaration brings more government bureaucracy and more delay into the management of public lands in the West.

And until elements of Jewell's compromise are hammered out under the National Environmental Policy Act, Otter is relying on ideology and speculation rather than any firm

evidence. - M.T.