

Opinion



Other Viewpoints

'National' champion hardly matters to perfect Utah

We've got to get something straightened out. It has to do with the questionable Thursday night game in Miami pitting Oklahoma and Florida for the "national football championship." From our perspective, before the game, we already had a winner!

It's Utah! So, as far as we're concerned, Oklahoma and Florida were playing for second and third place. After all, both of them are losers. Both brought 12-1 records to the flawed "championship" match-up.

Utah ended the season with a 13-0 — perfect — record! They picked up their 13th win a few days ago by showing Alabama what football is all about. You remember Alabama, the team that was ranked No. 1 in the country for five weeks and was expected to kick the Utah bunch off the field?

Well, that didn't happen. So we'll went through the Thursday night football farce, and when was all over, the winner was 13-1 and so-called national champion. Then the team that lost Thursday night was to be the No. 2 team in the country with— oops! — two, TWO LOSSES.

And where will Utah, 13-0, finally end up? Who knows; that'll be in the hands of a bunch of misguided people who still don't get it. Get what? The need for a playoff system, much like we have in basketball.

So, after Thursday night's final bowl game, we just laugh it off. The real champion emerged with a clean 13-0 slate. They weren't losers.

— Tom Dreiling, *The Norton Telegram*

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MARGULIES
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Firefighters an example of our best

I hung out with the Kansas State Firefighters Association last weekend.

The association was holding a regional school in Colby that lasted from 9 a.m. Saturday morning and to about 1:30 p.m. Sunday afternoon. I was assigned to cover the event, and it was quite an experience.

I learned, scratch that, I attempted to learn how to tie knots in the ropes and rescue class and I watched a fire in a controlled burn trailer at the Colby High School parking lot.

It turns out I may be the world's worst knot tier. The teacher my class was Doug Jannsen, a captain and paramedic with the Russell City Fire Department and Northwest Trustee for the Kansas State Firefighters Association. He is a likeable fellow with a good sense of humor and an otherworldly magician when it comes to tying knots.

He would sit there nonchalantly whipping together complicated knots while I churned out a garbled mess that didn't even vaguely resemble the knot I was supposed to be tying. He was like Picasso painting masterpieces while I sat in the back of the room drawing stick figures.

But my horrific knot tying is not what this column is about. This is about the heroes who walk among us unrecognized.

At first glance, they were nothing spectacular about the firefighters I met over the weekend. They seemed like your run-or-the-mill, everyday people. But in reality, the firefighters here in Colby and elsewhere in this country are anything but ordinary. They risk their lives for people they don't even know. I cannot think of anything more noble than that.

On Sept. 11, 2001, when the twin towers



Andy Heintz

Wildcat Ramblings

collapsed and people ran from the building in horror, New York firefighters were running into the buildings to try to save those who had been left behind. I cannot begin to grasp the courage it took those brave men and women to head in to do that, knowing they might not come back out alive.

This was an example of the best humankind has to offer in the face of an act that represented the very worst of human nature. While it's easy to remember the heroics of the firefighters on that day, it is more of a challenge to remember that firefighters participate in similar acts of bravery on a less grand scale all the time.

But America's true heroes are not just firefighters. They are the teachers, nurses, social workers, farmers, soldiers, nonprofit workers and charity workers who form the fabric that keeps this country sewn together. The true American hero is the woman who leaves a cushy job in suburbia to help house the homeless in an area that has fallen on hard times. The true American hero is the boss who refuses to cut his workers' health benefits even if it would improve his bottom line. The true American hero is the cop who takes a bullet for his partner or the church organizer who continues going door to door getting food donations for the food bank despite his old age

and arthritis.

In the midst of all the corporate scandals, political corruption, materialistic consumerism, Hollywood hoopla, petty political rivalries and other things that are really not that important, it is easy to forget about these people. But America cannot afford to forget, because these folks represent the very best this country has to offer.

And we of the media need to never forget to cover these special people. So if there is anybody in Colby whose good works are going unsung, please contact the *Free Press* so we can give them the praise that they deserve.

It is my belief that too much of today's media has adopted the "if it bleeds, it leads" mentality. It has become conventional wisdom to some that more violence, more sensationalism and more controversy equal higher ratings and increased profits. Even if this is true, does that make it OK for the media to reap the benefits of exploiting the darker aspects of human nature?

Is the almighty dollar all we should care about? I don't think so, and I think a significant number of those in the journalism profession would agree with me. So I plan on occasionally highlighting the heroic acts of the people in this country most deserving of praise — not because it will increase the paper's profits (although I think it might), but because it is the right thing to do.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

How to save money, promote happiness

We just ended an election season during which several Kansas school districts asked voters for additional money. In uncertain economic times, voters eyed these requests warily.

But here's a different idea that can benefit voters, schools, and families of students alike: Enact a refundable tax credit or a voucher plan that helps families move their children from public schools to private schools. Families whose children need an alternative to the local school system would benefit educationally and taxpayers could save money.

Generally, private schools need to spend less to educate each child than do public schools. This is true even of those students, usually from low-income families, who are considered "more costly to educate."

Here's an example: Say that in one town, the public school spends \$9,000 per student. A private school spends \$7,000. Offer parents a voucher or refundable tax credit for \$7,000, and for each student who migrates to a private school, taxpayers save \$2,000 each year. That money can be returned to the public school system, used for other public goals, or returned to taxpayers.

If we want parents to be directly responsible for some of the tuition costs—say \$500 each year—then reduce the voucher to \$6,500 and taxpayers save \$2,500 for each student who leaves. Those savings add up.

But don't private schools cost a lot more

Other Opinions

John R. LaPlante Flint Hills Center

than public ones? That is true for the most elite of the elite boarding schools.

But as a rule, private school costs compare very favorably with public schools. There are many reasons why, one of which is that private schools aren't burdened with a top-heavy administration.

For example, Bishop Ward High School of Kansas City, Kansas, says on its web site that it costs \$8,800 to educate a student there. (Thanks to fund-raising efforts, parents pay only \$7,500 in tuition, however.) By contrast, during the 2006-07 school year, the Kansas City, Kansas, school district spent \$13,941 per student.

In other words, given the opportunity to choose, families could be able to send their children to a private school at a lower per-pupil amount than we spend today.

It is true that in this scenario the public school "loses" some revenue for that student, but it saves even more in expenses it no longer has to pay.

The situation I briefly outline here is not hypothetical. It exists in at least 10 states. In 2007, Susan Aud analyzed voucher and tax credit programs then in place across the country. Aud, who teaches quantitative research and statistics at Johns Hopkins and George Mason universities, concluded that between 1990 and 2006, school choice programs saved taxpayers \$444 million. Most of that money—\$422 million—was at the local level.

Aud's estimate was a conservative one, for it considered only cost savings in classroom expenses, not other items. When we factor in all the other ways in which public schools spend money, the cost savings from school choice are even greater. If enough students leave a district, then the district could even close an older, costly-to-maintain building or avoid building new one.

The devil's in the details, of course. For one thing, lawmakers would have to decide how large to make the credit or voucher. Oddly enough, if the scholarship amount for each student is too low, it can end up costing the government money rather than saving it.

It's in everyone's best interest if children receive an education. If taxpayers and today's public schools can save money by letting some children attend lower-cost private schools, we all win.

John R. LaPlante is an education policy fellow with the Wichita-based Flint Hills Center for Public Policy.

Mallard Fillmore

Bruce Tinsley

