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## Football Scandal Talk of Town

### Hazing and sodomy claims hang over Las Vegas

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SANTA FE — Right now, Las Vegas, N.M., doesn't seem to be reeling from the accusations of hazing and sodomy that hang like a dark cloud over the Robertson High School football team.

Practice continued this week as usual. Cheerleaders ironed out routines under the goal posts as players sprinted through drills in full pads.

But the residents of Las Vegas are talking — at school, home, work, church, on the street and behind closed doors.

Subjects of the recent scandal and criminal investigation are Robertson Cardinals, after all. They've played in three straight state championship games — and won two.

And this is a small town, where everyone seems to know each other or be related. Gossip gets passed around like footballs at a Cardinals practice.

"Everybody's talking about it," said a Robertson student. "That's how it is here. We've all heard something."

Then he launched into the details, which haven't changed much since this story broke:

Around Aug. 13, during a preseason football camp at Western Life Camp in Gallinas Canyon 15 miles northwest of Las Vegas, between six and 12 players are alleged to have hazed between five and eight freshmen on the team. At least one player has reported being held down and sodomized with a broomstick.

It's also been alleged that a coach walked in during the assault, smirked at what was happening and left without intervening.

What's certain is that the new head coach, Ray Woods, has been suspended from the team along with his assistants and six players. Robertson Athletics Director Mike Yara was also placed on leave.

"That's all anyone's talking about, is what's going on," said Charlie Sandoval, who owns and operates Charlie's Spic and Span Bakery and Cafe, a popular restaurant in Las Vegas. "I feel sorry for the coaches and the whole school. We're a nice community and there's good things happening here, but everything gets overblown in this town for some reason or another."

One reason is the population's connectedness.

For instance, the Las Vegas district attorney was forced to pass this case to Santa Fe prosecutors.

Fourth Judicial District Attorney Richard D. Flores couldn't get involved because one of his employee's sons is reported as a victim in the case; another employee's brother is a suspect; and yet another employee is related to a suspect.

## **'Angry and hurt'**

Spic and Span's Sandoval said he's heard an account of what happened in the cabin at Western Life Camp from one of his employees, who is related to a victim. A victim also once worked at the cafe.

"There's a lot of people that are angry," Sandoval said. "They're angry and hurt. Nobody wants something like that to happen, especially to kids and to your friends' kids."

Tom Trigg, an administrator at Las Vegas' First United Presbyterian Church, said church members have submitted cards seeking prayers for the team.

"People do care around here. They don't think, 'Oh, it's just the football team,'" Trigg said. "People who are involved with the care of children are especially upset. We're supposed to protect children. That's above everything else."

Disc jockey Stephen Isaacs has been broadcasting Cardinals football games on KNMX radio for four years.

"I love these boys dearly," he said. "It's just not something that's expected. It hurts people."

Isaacs said the vast majority of people are appalled about the allegations, but a handful of people have dismissed it along the lines of "boys being boys."

A few have been said to have taken it further.

As teammates tried to focus on football with their return to practice last week, witnesses said they were sometimes taunted by passing motorists yelling the offensive terms "queer" and "fag."

"People are angry, they're frustrated, they're embarrassed, they're disgusted," Isaacs said. "It paints everyone in a negative light."

Many of those sentiments were expressed during heated exchanges on a KNMX talk show just a few days after the allegations came to light, with callers saying they'd be out for blood if their loved ones were ever violently hazed, according to a Las Vegas Optic report.

## **Keeping quiet**

One Robertson High junior said any classroom discussion that could have grown out of the incident had been dampened by what he believed was the administration's order to teachers not to talk about what happened.

"I think the students are upset about it, and the administration at this point is just trying to keep it under control," the 16-year-old said.

Across town from Robertson, at the Xtreme Team Sales store down the street from West Las Vegas High School, a Cardinals T-shirt hangs in the front window. Liz Griego, who runs the store, said they sell more West merchandise.

She bounced her wide-eyed infant son in her arms as she said she was worried about what this story might mean for Las Vegas.

"We're a small town, and we don't get that much publicity," she said. "It's going to hurt us bad. Nobody wants to move here and let their kids go to a school where they say that happened."

She looked down at her son.

"I would lose my mind if that happened to him," she said.

The people in Las Vegas continue to follow the news. By several accounts, newspapers carrying this story have been selling out. At least two separate investigations about what exactly happened at Western Life Camp are under way, with no timetable for a resolution.

Meanwhile, rumors swirl.

Rumors that the assaulted players had their pants on the whole time, that the football season might get canceled, that one victim moved out of New Mexico, that local politicians want to cover it all up.

Amid all this, the Robertson High School football season starts Friday night, at home against Portales.

**Not tolerated**

APS says hazing may be happening, but it's prohibited **D1**



**KATHARINE KIMBALL/JOURNAL** Robertson High School's football team goes through its regular workout Monday, practicing for this week's season opener against Portales.