

Monson: The price of a ticket does not buy a license to be ignorant. High school administrators are now driving that point home.

"We have to learn to respect people again."

[I don't know Layton Christian High basketball coach Bobby Porter, never met the man. But I like him](#), like what he recently said about racism and vulgarism raising their ugly heads at high school basketball games in the state.

Learning is needed. Those heads cannot be raised without ignorant individuals lifting them up.

Have you ever wondered why some people think it's OK to yell stupid things from the stands during a game that if they yelled at someone on the street would lead to a fistfight? At least on the street, the offended can nobly turn and walk away. And yet, suddenly, [in the confines of a gym, a high school gym, where players and coaches cannot walk away, these offenders somehow feel empowered to utter ugliness](#).

That empowerment must be stripped away.

And the Utah High School Activities Association is attempting to do exactly that via new language and laws.

On Wednesday, the association's board of trustees approved that new

language, adding it to its handbook, a move that “strongly condemns taunting and harassment on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, creed or national origin.”

Actually, it goes further than just that. The policy also “disapproves of any form of taunting which is intended to embarrass, ridicule or demean others under any circumstances ...”

Some administrators earlier had said that racist and vulgar comments yelled out were difficult, complicated to eradicate because they are difficult to define. And even when they are properly defined, there’s establishing a balance between enforcing acceptable decorum at a game and allowing freedom of speech.

Let’s call BS on that.

It’s not difficult, it’s not complicated.

We all know racist language when we hear it, and if anybody out there doesn’t, then they should learn it the hard way — by taking responsibility and suffering the consequences for the hateful things they scream at kids and coaches.

The new policy defines those unacceptable racial comments thusly:

“Racial harassment consists of conduct relating to an individual’s race when the conduct: 1. Has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment. 2. Has the purpose or effect of emotionally or unreasonably interfering with an individual’s performance.”

It also bans behavior that falls into the sorry category of racial violence.

It defines taunting as "any actions or comments by coaches, players or spectators which are intended to bait, anger, embarrass, ridicule or demean others."

Well. It's about damn time.

The policy holds school principals and administrators responsible for the conduct of groups associated with their school community.

From this corner, any demonstration of ignorance at a prep hoops or football game, or a game of any sort, in front of a gym or stadium full of high school students, should be met with tolerance that is preceded with a big, fat zero.

If that's what Porter meant by learning to respect again ... hear, hear.

Hopefully, the UHSAA's stance is strong and unmistakable enough to make it clear to the most backward of minds in prep gyms and stadiums everywhere that racist or aggressive remarks of all kinds will not be allowed. And if anyone goes ahead and uses those taunts or demonstrates that conduct, their right to sit among community kids at a sports event will be terminated.

There should be no argument to that. No yeah-but.

The UHSAA's board of trustees currently is drawing up specific consequences for fans, coaches and players who fall short in these regards.

Just as the Utah Jazz showed when they faced this decision earlier this year with clueless fans, banning them for racist and homophobic remarks yelled at an opposing player, the same should be the case at high school games, where people of the community, young and old and anywhere in-between, shouldn't be exposed to that sort of ignorance and aggression.

The fact that even the most ignorant among us would care so much about the outcome of a basketball or football game to invoke those kinds of words to verbally injure, to put an opponent down is sickening.

They should never be tolerated in any high school setting.

Not in any shape or form.

I'm no lawyer, and do not know the exact legal definition of vulgarism, but a high school gym or stadium is not the proper place to bend or soften that definition. As the UHSAA policy is meant to curtail and eliminate fan and coach and player aggression, wholly disapproving of taunting, that includes words aimed at the overall mental state or physical appearance of any kid or coach.

Having spent many hours in thousands of gyms and stadiums, from pro palaces to the most modest of prep venues, it appears to me that the aim of some fans is, in fact, to ridicule, demean and embarrass, all so the home team can win.

The scale on the matter slides from mean to vicious. I once heard fans chant at an opposing player the word, "Spot." That's the name they gave him because he had a large birthmark on his face. An extreme example occurred in 1988 when now-Golden State Warriors coach

Steve Kerr played for Arizona and the Wildcats were warming up before a game at Arizona State. A group of fans chanted at Kerr, "PLO ... PLO ... PLO." His father, Malcolm, who was the president of American University in Beirut, had been assassinated a few years earlier.

Anybody think that's cool? Anybody think that's acceptable? Anybody think policy disallowing such comments and behavior is somehow ... weak?

We should know what's unacceptable when we hear it. Or before anyone utters it. A basketball gym isn't a church, but the price of a ticket does not buy the license to be cruel.

Taunting should not happen at any game, anywhere. Not without substantial penalty, penalty that demonstrates to everybody who already knows such behavior should never be tolerated, and especially to those who don't, that it will not be.

Listen to Bobby Porter. He's right.

GORDON MONSON hosts *"The Big Show"* with Jake Scott weekdays from 3-7 p.m. on 97.5 FM and 1280 AM The Zone.