

Sul Ross Group (SRG) Bulletin Sixteen

20 November 20

After South Carolina Win – Tennessee and Ole Miss Games Postponed

The Fightin' Texas Aggie football team went to play and beat the South Carolina Gamecocks, and it was a great win for a team improving and definitely on the rise with its number 5 national ranking. Unfortunately, one staff and one team member tested positive for COVID-19 after returning home. Therefore, the contact tracing protocols had to be initiated. Because of the results, our next game (at Tennessee) had to be postponed until the 12th of December.

One can read all about the details of this episode on the 12th Man website. However, the tracing protocols required by the SEC and the CDC revealed that many of the traveling party met the threshold of exposure (withing six feet for 15 minutes). This was due to the travel regimen which places the party in confined spaces such as the aircraft and the visiting locker room. Under the SEC agreement, if 53 scholarship players are not available, for whatever reason including the 14-day quarantine period, then the team cannot compete.

Athletic Director Ross Bjork has given several press releases and interviews, and there are a range of options being considered. Such is the case of the Ole Miss game which might also be postponed – and there is a makeup plan in the works for that game too. More to come on this high interest and important situation.

Fast forward a week - we now know that the Ole Miss game was postponed also because the quarantined players, as reported by Coach Fisher, will not get out of that status until Sunday the 22nd of November. Therefore, it is likely that the Tennessee game will be rescheduled for December the 12th, and the Ole Miss game for the 19th. We shall see. Our next game, therefore, will be at Kyle Field when we BTHO the folks from across the Sabine River!

Athletic Director Bjork Supports Texas Aggie Athletes' Protests During National Anthem

In his 17 November Town Hall session on the 12th Man Productions, Athletic Director Bjork discussed the policy about and support for political protests by players during the National Anthem before athletic contests. One can access the video feed here and hear what he had to say: (<https://12thman.com/news/2020/11/17/general-bjork-holds-latest-aggie-town-hall.aspx>).

You shall learn that Mr. Bjork confirmed his Department's support and policy for Texas Aggie athletes expressing "first amendment rights" during the playing of the National Anthem before contests. He was referring to recent soccer and volleyball games when

some players have chosen to kneel. He also anticipates more kneeling will occur during men's and women's basketball games soon. And later at softball and baseball games.

He went on to say that "The goal here is to unify. We know people may have different thoughts about the Anthem and that's fine. That's why we have a free country the last time I checked. Freedom of speech is alive and well, and the reason why they are able to express themselves is because of the First Amendment and people fought for those freedoms."

Bjork said that he "hopes" the 12th Man can follow suit with his Department and "support players rights to express themselves." And "we need our donors and former students to support our athletes."

A few Comment and Questions

Well – OK, Mr. Bjork. We in the SRG well know about precious rights of freedoms granted in the US Constitution. We also know a lot about "the people" to whom you referred who fought for freedom! Texas Aggies have been doing that for 144 years in harm's way, and many did not return. We are not sure about your Texas Aggie orientation program when you arrived here, but our history and culture are rich about these, and our core values and traditions reflect that. We assume that our 600 athletes undergo a regimen to some reasonable degree to learn about these too. Checking with the Vice President of Student Affairs, it seems to be sparse at best in your Department.

We also understand TAMU Expressive Activity policy and guidance, along with 36 US Code [301] regarding etiquette protocols honoring the US flag during the playing of the National Anthem and a person's behavior. We also have "checked" (as you say) the 1989 and 1990 Supreme Court decisions which found that the Government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds it offensive and disagreeable. So yes, "It's a free country" and we are all most thankful to be free citizens! And yes, one can desecrate a US Flag in public and not go to jail. One can also kneel during the playing of the National Anthem. "It's a free country." We get it, and probably better than most – thanks for your input!

However, as you said, "We know people may have different thoughts about the Anthem, [added - and political expressions at Texas Aggie athletic events] and that's fine." And we assure you that the "donors and former students" to whom you refer do also, including the Texas Aggie 12th Man Tradition we hold so dear. It embodies ALL AGGIES in addition to our athletic teams. In fact, speaking of support, the reason you have a Department to run is that Former Student donors gave you the best stadiums, facilities, staff, scholarships and the PROMISE (via the Aggie Network - Former Students all) for a happy, purposeful and fulfilled life (after athletic careers) for your athletes during their recruitment. So, you can "hope" the Former Students "unify" with you, but a vast majority in our cohort do not see all this exactly your way.

We should note that the public address announcers at Aggie athletic events, when it's time for the playing of the National Anthem, tell us all to rise and prepare for its playing in accordance with the protocol. Since this comes under your purview as the AD, then are you going to modify the narrative for the announcers to tell the 12th Man that we can kneel also if we choose and have our "protests of the day" included in the announcement? And what about the Veterans? Can they still salute the flag as prescribed in the federal statute protocol?

This leads to the policy you just promulgated. You are a particularly important leader here at Aggieland with huge responsibilities and accountability. Did you and your Department alone make the policy? Who all were included? The TAMU President? How about the Chancellor and Regents? After all, it was a policy which over-reaches more than just you and 600 athletes, a fraction of whom want to kneel as a political expression in an Aggie uniform. How about the President of "The Aggie Network" who happens to be the President and CEO of The Association of Former Students?

It would seem that, as we suggested weeks ago re this issue, that Texas Aggies, of all people on this planet Earth, could get together and work this out and truly "unify" in true Texas Aggie tradition. There are three sides to this story, and there is bound to be some agreeable middle ground – somewhere, even though "all of us were in college at one point in time!"

An Apology

In Bulletin Fifteen, 15 November 2020, we incorrectly stated that Coach Kuhn's husband was standing nearby during the playing of the National Anthem. She is not married, and this was a mistake. We sincerely apologize.

The TAMU Presidential Search Firm

As a belated update, the new Dallas Texas search firm for a new Texas Aggie president is R. William Funk & Associates. You can check out their web site at:
<http://www.rwilliamfunk.com>

You can reach us at: SRGpresident@aggienetwork.com

Reminder: Anyone (Ags and non Ags, SRG Ags and all other Ags too) can "opt in" by going to <https://www.aggienetwork.com/theassociation/sulrossgroup.aspx> and simply putting in your name and email address, and then clicking on "submit." You will then automatically receive all the SRG Bulletins.

If you wish comment to Those who decide:

Chancellor Sharp: chancellor@tamus.edu

The Board of Regents: vickie@tamus.edu or jbell@tamus.edu

President Young: presidentyoung@tamu.edu

Athletic Director Bjork: rrabun@athletics.tamu.edu