

Gillette News Record

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FIRST YEAR, FIRST TITLE

Campbell County wins state's first high school softball championship, **B3**

NEXT MAN UP Longtime Bell Nob superintendent is new county Parks and Rec director, **A10**



News Record Photos/Mike Moore

Thunder Basin High School graduates Tailey Schnaible, left, and Mason Masteller, right, hug art teacher Roxanne West at the conclusion of their 2021 commencement ceremony at the Wyoming Center on Sunday afternoon.

Campbell now a 1-horse county

Judge's ruling upholds county resolution, shuts down 3 historic horse racing outlets

By **JONATHAN GALLARDO**
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On Friday, a district judge denied a motion for a preliminary injunction against a recently passed county resolution that essentially gave 307 Horse Racing control over off-track betting within 100 miles of Gillette.

That means that as of Saturday, the two Wyoming Downs locations in Gillette, as well as the Gillette Horse Palace, had to shut down that part of their businesses.

Because 307 Horse Racing has an exclusive contract with Cam-plex to conduct live horse racing through 2025, that means that if nothing changes, Wyoming Downs and the Horse Palace must remain closed to off-track betting for the next five years.

A few hours after the decision, Eric Nelson, managing member of Wyoming Downs, wrote in an email to the News Record that because of Friday's decision, "Wyoming Downs may cancel or will reduce (its) season to nothing. All employees in Gillette will lose (their) jobs."

After listening to hours of testimony and arguments from both sides Friday afternoon and evening, District Judge F. Scott Peasley ruled against Wyoming Horse Racing and Wyoming Downs, which claimed the Campbell County commissioners overstepped their authority. They asked Peasley to delay the resolution so they could remain open.

On April 20, the commissioners passed a resolution that gives the live horse racing operator control over off-track betting and simulcasting in the county. It also allows that written permission for simulcasting and off-track betting can be given to groups that aren't putting on live horse races.

307 Horse Racing's first live horse races were held Saturday, meaning that with the resolution, the three off-track betting locations in Gillette can't operate for the next five years.

Peasley said that based on the limited evidence presented Friday afternoon, he "can't say the commissioners did not have the right to pass the resolution."

The plaintiffs' attorneys cited a 2014 case, Wyoming Downs LLC v. Board of County Commissioners for the County of Sweetwater. In that case, the Sweetwater County Commission denied Wyoming Downs' request to open an off-track betting location because commissioners wanted to support Wyoming Horse Racing.

Then-Judge Keith Kautz reversed the decision on the grounds that "economic protectionism by itself is not a legitimate state interest."

Traci Lacock, an attorney representing Wyoming Downs, said the Sweetwater case showed "a desire to protect another competitor from the competition. That's exactly what's occurring in this current action."

Attorney John Sundahl, representing the county commissioners, argued that the claim that the commissioners wrote and passed this resolution to favor 307 Horse Racing over the other two operators is false. He said there is a "huge distinction" between the two cases. In the Sweetwater case, it was clear that one company was being favored over another, Sundahl said. With

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These students outclassed COVID

High school seniors reminisce, inspire, look forward at 2021 graduations

By **CARY LITTLEJOHN** * NEWS RECORD WRITER
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One day, one building, two graduations. Long high school careers had been made even longer by the disruption of last year due to COVID-19 and the extra precautions that lasted the entirety of their final year on each campus. But on Sunday, the seniors from Thunder Basin High School and Campbell County High School finally walked the stage to receive their hard-earned diplomas.

Thunder Basin High School

TBHS students and families celebrated with the first of the day's graduations at Cam-plex's Wyoming Center. Seating on three sides of the center looked at a stage above which hung a giant "2021" sign, and the doors on each side of the stage were framed by blue and silver balloons twisted together to form an arch.

Promptly at 1 p.m., the TBHS band began Pomp and Circumstance, and the TBHS faculty walked out first, dressed in black gowns. Behind them came the graduates, more than 250 of them, dressed in blue, and after they made a lap around the entirety of the center, they began to fill in the seats directly in front of the stage, gradually becoming an ever-larger sea of blue caps and gowns.

"I know I can speak for my classmates when I say that I'm beyond grateful that we could stay in school," said Jennifer Michaels, one of the Class of 2021's seven valedictorians, as she welcomed the crowd.

Her words had to have been music to the ears of district superintendent Alex Ayers and school trustees who sat off to her right on the stage. It was that sentiment around which they'd based all of their actions and plans for the school year, reaching back to the



News Record Photo/Mike Moore

U.S. Army Specialist/E4 Nathaniel Sams surprises his sister Tashawna Lazzaretti with an unexpected visit while delivering her diploma during Campbell County High School's graduation ceremony Sunday afternoon at the Wyoming Center.

summer of 2020 as the district contemplated how best to keep students in schools despite the pandemic.

One of the class's salutatorians, Danielle Lehnen, and two of its valedictorians, Carson Hanson and Sydney Solum, gave addresses that looked both backward and forward, gave advice and shared

collective emotions, and mostly wished their classmates well on their future endeavors.

But the heart of the ceremony was contained in a speech voiced by senior class president Dylan Coleman. He began simply and honestly.

"I used to be afraid of the word 'graduation,'" Coleman told the

crowd. "That sounds silly, but the second I started high school, that word terrified me. You see, at first, graduation meant growing up, leaving, being on your own. When my family moved here to Gillette and I started at Thunder Basin, my sister had just graduated herself, and it felt like we had left her back in Oklahoma."

He spoke of the dread of seeing classmates graduate and go off to college or careers during his junior year.

"I can count on one hand how many friends I still keep in contact with," Coleman said.

Those experiences shaped his fear of the word. Then it came for him.

"It was senior year, and suddenly everything got real," Coleman said. "I was taking college classes. I had early out. I could do whatever I wanted. I was a senior, baby!"

As he described the increasing dread he felt as a senior, Coleman drew on his speech and debate and broadcast skills. It wasn't just a speech he gave but rather a performance, with modulated pitches and tones, practiced timing and flow. He communicated a feeling that surely was not unique to him. The dread gave way to acceptance.

"Then, the sun rose up today, like any other day," he said. "I could

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