

Guest Column

A southerner looks at the feud

This guest column was sent to the Idaho Argonaut by Ben Plastino, executive and political editor of the Idaho Falls Post-Register. It appeared Wednesday in that paper.

Sept 24 1971

By Ben J. Plastino
Post-Register Staff Writer

The attitude and catcalls emanating during and after the football game between the University of Idaho and Boise State College last Sept. 11 at Boise underlines why higher education in Idaho faces such rough sledding for the next few years.

To many Boiseans it appeared the football contest was a test of academic standards between the two institutions of higher learning, rather than a display of brawn among a handful of athletes.

Boise State College was fired up that night and there is little question it was the better of the two teams as it vanquished the comparatively listless University of Idaho Vandals 42-14. BSC, as was stated at a joint BSC-U of I booster luncheon that same noon, wanted to upset its more ancient and well known adversary.

Where is the university

Many Boiseans, and this even includes some University of Idaho graduates, remarked that this game, among other things, demonstrated that Boise should be the seat of the state's leading university.

Many Idahoans, including this writer who is a graduate of the U of I, agree Boise should have been the seat of the University of Idaho, which, incidentally, was founded even before Idaho became a state. But it wasn't, unfortunately, and it never will be, and that's that.

If the remarks tossed about during and after the game were those of a few hotheads and overly zealous Boiseans it wouldn't amount to much. However, this attitude is pretty well reflected among the vast citizenry of Idaho's capital city, including Ada's legislative contingent.

The prowess of football teams, of course, doesn't reflect the greatness of any college or university. One has only to look at such institutions as Harvard, Yale Princeton and the remainder of the so-called Ivy colleges, which play little better brand of ball than Idaho, or Chicago or George Washington universities, which don't even have football teams.

In fact, U of I president Ernest Hartung has indicated some de-emphasis on Vandal football, feeling perhaps that youths go to college to attain a well rounded education. A university and college is judged by its alumni and the calibre the U of I turns out is a mark of distinction.

This writer, at the time the Idaho Legislature by a narrow margin agreed to admit BSC to a status of higher education in the state system some four years ago, predicted it would become a political headache for years to come.

At that time, the Boise legislature assured their colleagues they would not ask for significant amounts of state funds, only that they wanted the distinction of higher education status. Of course, this proved only so much talk as the Ada lawmakers soon demanded money far above what they had promised.

This writer agrees Boise should have a university but only when the population and tax base permit it without detracting

from the two older institutions, U of I and Idaho State University at Pocatello, not at present. This could come when the state approaches the million population mark from its present 700,000.

In other states

One only has to look to Washington State, Oregon and Montana which have only two major state universities each,

"One only has to look at such institutions as Harvard, Yale, Princeton and the remainder of the so-called Ivy colleges, which play little better brand of ball than Idaho..."

and Wyoming where there is one. Utah, with a population in excess of a million, has three.

The attitude of the Boise citizenry, reflected by the Boise legislators, now has drawn antagonism from many other sections of the state, particularly East Idaho and North Idaho which have joined together frequently in high education legislative matters.

Boise Valley including Ada and Canyon counties, still has only some 150,000 population as compared with 550,000 in the remainder of the state. The Ada and Canyon legislative delegation, even with the 1970 reapportionment, only has nine of the 35 legislative districts, or 27 of the 105 state senators and state representatives, six in Ada and three in Canyon-Owyhee. But there is doubt that Canyon would stand solid with Ada on many legislative matters.

These are the hard facts of politics for the Boiseans to digest.

At present the legislature allocates lump sums for higher education. In the current term some \$28 million was allocated, of which the U of I got \$12 million, ISU and BSC about \$7 million each and Lewis-Clark College at Lewiston some \$2 million. U of I, BSC and ISU have between 7,000 and 8,000 students each, although BSC has a large number of part-time students.

The State Board of Education is made up of seven, but this includes only two from Boise, Steele Barnett, chairman, and John Swartley, along with Dr. J. Kenneth Thatcher, Idaho Falls; Joe McCollum, Twin Falls; John Peacock, vice chairman, Kellogg; Mal Deaton, Pocatello, and J. P. Munson, Sandpoint.

Thus, the two Boise members are paired against five others when it comes to high education fund allocation, although these public spirited men attempt to distribute the funds on merits, regardless of politics and sectionalism.

The academic standing of the University of Idaho is well known. Its teachings are directed on quality, rather than quantity.

Board of education members recall Boise factions attempted to halt, without success, a new College of Law building at Moscow. In fact, the Boise president, Dr. John Barnes, supported the Moscow building, much to the chagrin of some of his townsmen.

A healthy football rivalry, or any intercollegiate competition as exist between the U of I and BSC, is one thing. When political overtones are interjected, it is something else.

The arrogance of some Boise faction can only weaken any effort to strengthen BSC, make no mistake about that.



Tom Hawkesworth