

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

NAME, IMAGE, LIKENESS RULES CHANGE COLLEGE SPORTS

Even if college basketball isn't your thing, you may be feeling a tinge of excitement about our hometown team, the San Diego State University Aztecs. As I write this, the Aztecs have reached the Final Four, the near pinnacle of the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I basketball season; a victory on Saturday would mean they are playing for the national championship tomorrow.

Regardless of the outcome, Tommy Morris hopes the Aztecs' success will inspire people to show their support for the team through a donation to the MESA Foundation (mesafoundation.org), a 501c3 organization. Morris serves on the foundation's advisory board.

The Mentoring & Empowering Student Athletes Foundation was established last year to provide Aztec student athletes a way to monetarily benefit from their name, image and likeness, or NIL. It connects players — and their social media platforms — to charitable organizations in San Diego. They promote and participate in events, raising awareness and

funds for the charities.

Players are compensated for their involvement. According to Morris, the money is most often used to help with rent or airfare, so parents can see a game. As an added benefit, the athletes deepen their off-the-court connection with our community.

MESA came about after the NCAA adopted the Interim Name, Image and Likeness Policy in July 2021. It allows student athletes to monetize their NIL without jeopardizing their eligibility to play.

In a recent New York Times opinion piece, University of Notre Dame President John Jenkins and Athletic Director Jack Swarbrick provided historical context for the decision. When the NCAA men's basketball tournament began in 1939, there were eight teams. The numbers doubled over the years to 64 teams in 1985; an opening round "play in" was added in 2001 and expanded in 2011.

Television coverage grew along with the tournament. CBS and Turner have paid hundreds of millions of dollars a year for the

broadcast rights (soon to be \$1 billion). As the tournament's popularity increased, so did the value of a winning team — and the salaries of successful coaches.

As Jenkins and Swarbrick wrote, it created concerns about fairness. Student athletes contributed considerable talent and hard work but couldn't be compensated for it — even as their schools and coaches profited. That led to antitrust suits against the NCAA and athletic conferences and, now, a change in NCAA regulations.

And as Tommy Morris explained, social media has become an accelerant in the pay-for-play discussion. The top student athletes have star power beyond their performance on the court or field. On3, a company that determines NIL valuations, uses an algorithm that considers both "roster value" (athletic results) and "brand value" (social media strength and market exposure).

It's landed San Diego native Mikey Williams in the No. 2 spot on the NIL list — even before he plays a minute of college hoops. Williams' current valuation is \$3.6

million. He's considered the 24th best player in the country and a social media phenom, with 6 million followers. Williams, who will play for the Memphis Tigers this fall, already has endorsement deals with Puma and other companies.

I understand the argument in favor of paying student athletes — and I think it's the right thing to do. Transparency is certainly better than the open secret of under-the-table payments.

But I can't help thinking about the fairness factor and the likelihood that NIL will deepen inequities between teams and players. Smaller programs will undoubtedly have a tough time competing against schools whose supporters can afford to pay up. And locker room conflict — between the haves and have nots — will grow.

Sports Illustrated senior writer Ross Dellenger said NIL deals have created "a new arms race" in college sports. Athletes are being paid large sums of money (sometimes as much as seven figures) for endorsements and appearances, underwritten by big donors. "Collectives" have been

established at top-tier schools, pooling millions of dollars for the purpose of athlete recruitment and retention.

It's why MESA Foundation landed on a different approach, compensating players equally for using their NIL in a way that benefits the community.

Not so long ago, college sports had a different sort of appeal for players. They built lifelong friendships. They gained leadership skills. And they got an education — important, considering that fewer than 2 percent of student athletes go on to play professionally.

They also learned what it means to be the member of a team, acting unselfishly for the good of all. In the NIL era — with its focus on personal gain — teamwork could suffer. Sure, the players will be enriched. The fans? Not so much.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com

CHOIR • Group has performed at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, other noted venues

FROM B1
Krahn, who retired as a brigadier general in 2006, suggested the cadets stop by the shelter run by Alpha Project. President and CEO Bob McElroy, who attended Crawford High with him in the early 1970s.

"This is a good meeting for you," Krahn told cadets after his high school friend gave them a tour of the shelter. "Remember duty, honor, country. And if you really listen to Bob here, it's duty, honor, dignity. Not just serving country, but serving something bigger than yourself."

"What happens here is like a mini-West Point," he continued. "It's about selfless service, about doing something for other people not just because it makes you feel good, but because it makes the world a better place."

Dressed in pressed white shirts, white caps and gray slacks or skirts adorned with a red sash, the Glee Club performed about a dozen songs in tight harmonies that brought smiles and rousing applause from their audience.

Among the best-received songs was the female section's rendition of Bill Withers' "Lean on Me," which had



ALEJANDRO TAMAYO U-T

Cadets from the West Point Glee Club choir perform at the Alpha Project shelter in downtown San Diego on Friday. Earlier in the day, the group serenaded an audience at the VA Hospital in La Jolla.

the audience joining in for the hand-clapping section of the song, and Pharrell Williams' "Happy."

An all-male portion of the show had audience members laughing at the singer's antics during "Coney Island

Baby" and "Good Old A Cappella."

The student choir is more than 100 years old and has

performed at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Boston Pops, Opera Orchestra of New York, the Super Bowl

and many other venues. On Friday, their stage was asphalt, in front of a row of portable toilets and an appreciative audience.

"That's what we need," said Tangela Payne, who has been at the shelter for about a year and was on the street for a year before then.

"That's what we need," said Payne, who is attending City College with a plan to become a certified personal trainer. "We need good stuff like this to get our heads out of the clouds, to keep our heads in a happy mode, stop thinking about things for a little bit and just relax and enjoy our day."

The performance also was meaningful to cadet Emma Larson, a sophomore visiting San Diego for the first time.

"We normally go to VA hospitals to reach out to former military, but we've never come to a homeless shelter before, at least in my time," she said. "But it is an incredible opportunity. This is really heartfelt. I've had family members who used to be homeless, so it has a personal touch to it. It means a lot to be able to reach out and provide some sort of love and support."

gary.warth@suniontribune.com

PROJECTS

FROM B1
The bike-lane protectors will be installed on North Melrose Drive south of Olive Avenue to Ascot Drive, South Melrose Drive from Matagual Drive to the southern city limit, North Santa Fe Avenue from Bobier Drive to Vista Village Drive and Vista Village Drive from Civic Center Drive to West Vista Way.

Delineators also will be placed on East Village Way from Civic Center Drive to Bobier Drive, Bobier Drive from North Santa Fe Avenue to East Vista Way, Sycamore Avenue from South Melrose Drive to Green Oak Road and Civic Center Drive from

Eucalyptus Avenue to Ocean View Drive.

An alternate plan to use asphalt berms rather than plastic delineators would have cost an additional \$450,000. Council members agreed the city may someday consider replacing the plastic devices with asphalt if funding is available.

Also at the meeting, council members unanimously approved funding for two capital improvement projects and also to continue funding for several programs that help homeless people, youths and seniors. The funding source is \$990,000 in community development block grants.

The council in 2019 approved a plan to fund programs to provide emergency

assistance and housing for homeless people, health services including mental health and substance abuse, support for seniors and people with special needs, and crime awareness and prevention services.

The 2023-2024 annual action plan approved by the council Tuesday will provide \$25,000 to Operaton Hope for shelter and case management for homeless families and women, \$16,000 to the Alpha Project for homeless outreach, \$16,000 to the Boys & Girls Club of Vista, \$12,000 for Mama's Kitchen to provide meal delivery to people with HIV, AIDS, cancer and other critical illnesses and \$15,000 to North County Lifeline for services for low-income families.

Grants also will provide \$10,000 to Palomar Family Counseling services for counseling to students in the Vista Unified School Districts, \$10,000 for the city's senior nutrition program, \$11,000 for Vista Community Clinic's tutoring program for at-risk students at Rancho Buena Vista High School, \$16,000 for Vista Community Clinic's Wellness Clinic for checkups, immunizations and vaccines and \$16,000 for Voices for Children's foster care services.

Vista City Council Member Corinna Contreras noted that the \$148,000 in grants was a relatively small amount for the many services provided to the city.

"You all make miracles and move mountains, and

you do so with a shoestring budget," she said. "And I know this is just a drop in the bucket, but the return on the investment is so big."

In capital improvement projects, grant funding also will provide \$644,000 for sidewalks on Avenue de Benito Juarez between West California Avenue and West Connecticut Avenue, a street many children use to walk to school.

Block grant funding also will provide improvements to the Gloria McClellan Senior Center, including the construction of a fitness center, large game room and break room in the Azalea building, estimated to cost \$340,000.

gary.warth@suniontribune.com

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Sunday, April 2, 2023.

Today's highlights in history

On April 2, 2020, the number of confirmed coronavirus cases worldwide passed the 1 million mark, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. The captain of the San Diego-based aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt, which was facing a coronavirus outbreak, was fired after widely distributing a memo pleading for help; Navy Secretary Thomas Modly said Capt. Brett Crozier had demonstrated "poor judgment" in a crisis. (Modly himself would resign days later after facing a backlash over his harsh criticism of Crozier in remarks to the crew.)

On this date

In 1912, the just-completed British passenger liner Titanic left Belfast to begin its sea trials eight days before the start of its ill-fated maiden voyage.
In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war against Germany, saying, "The world must be made safe for democracy." (Congress declared war four days later.)
In 1992, mob boss John Gotti was convicted in New York of murder and racketeering.
In 2005, Pope John Paul II died at age 84.

Today's birthdays

Actor Sharon Acker is 88. Actor Dame Penelope Keith is 83. Actor Linda Hunt is 78. Singer Emmylou Harris is 76. Actor Sam Anderson is 76. Actor Pamela Reed is 74. Musician Dave Robinson (The Cars) is 74. Actor Christopher Meloni is 62. Singer Keren Woodward (Bananarama) is 62. Actor Clark Gregg is 61. Actor Pedro Pascal is 48. Actor Michael Fassbender is 46. Actor Jesse Plemons is 35.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SMOLENS

FROM B1
before then, Filner repeatedly butted heads with other city officials. In 2006, San Diego had transitioned to a strong-mayor form of government, which did away with the city manager position and made the mayor the chief executive. That meant Filner was in charge of much of the bureaucracy.

Fletcher, now 46, is a Marine veteran who worked as a congressional aide and in 2008 was elected to the state Assembly, where he served for four years. He ran unsuccessfully for mayor twice, against Filner and others in 2012 and then in the 2013 special election to replace Filner after he resigned.

Gonzalez Fletcher, then a labor leader, assisted Filner's mayoral bid. Then, as a newly elected member of the Assembly, she backed Fletcher in the special election.

In 2018, Fletcher won a seat on the Board of Supervisors. The lone Democrat at the time, he often collaborated with Republican members. There were differences between them, but little rancor. He had been the clear favorite to win the seat being vacated by state

Sen. Toni Atkins, the termed-out Senate leader from San Diego, until last Sunday night.

The supervisors set policy, but the county chief administrative officer implements it and runs the bureaucracy. There was no noticeable disruption in county operations when the Fletcher scandal broke last week.

His quick exit may have prevented problems from growing at the County Administration Center. Last Sunday, Fletcher said he would take an immediate leave of absence to get treatment, and on Wednesday announced he would resign. Later, he set his resignation date for May 15.

Filner was accused of inappropriate behavior by nearly 20 women. Some were prominent and many were well-established in their careers — from a Navy rear admiral to a university dean.

The lawsuit against Fletcher — and the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System, where the supervisor had been board chair — was filed by Grecia Figueroa, a former MTS public relations specialist and one-time television reporter.

A law firm that has worked for MTS is looking into the accusations, and it's



ADRIANA HELDIZ U-T FILE

Supervisor Nathan Fletcher made a quick exit compared with Bob Filner's drawn-out demise.

too early to tell how the fallout may affect the agency.

Filner had insisted he wouldn't resign, but then-City Attorney Jan Goldsmith, then-City Council President Todd Gloria and others maneuvered to force him out of office. Fletcher resigned in a comparative blink of an eye, after Gonzalez Fletcher said she asked him to.

Filner's fiancée said two days before the mayoral

scandal broke that their engagement was off and their relationship was over. Gonzalez Fletcher continues to defend her husband against what they both say are false accusations. Fletcher admitted to having what he said were "consensual interactions" with Figueroa.

The accusations against Filner first surfaced on July 10, 2013. He resigned on Aug. 30. But the sordid episode had a couple more chapters.

Less than two months later, on Oct. 15, Filner pleaded guilty to felony false imprisonment and two counts of misdemeanor battery involving three women. On Dec. 9, he was sentenced to three months of home confinement and three years of probation.

State and national news organizations have run stories on Fletcher, but not to the extent they did during the drawn-out Filner saga. Comedian John Oliver launched a few rants about San Diego's mayor on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart."

Prior to the 2012 mayoral primary, a poll showed Fletcher in third place behind then-City Councilmember Carl DeMaio and Filner. But he led both in head-to-head matchups.

There have been plenty of "what ifs" through the years about the kind of mayor Fletcher would have been — and now there are more.

Tweet of the week

Goes to Erin Hahn (@erinhahn_author).

"Please stop acting like arming teachers is the answer. You don't even trust us to pick out books for your children."

[@michael.smolens](https://twitter.com/michael.smolens)