

COMMUNITY NEWS

COMMUNITY VOICES

The dangers of unforgiving and snap judgments

By Rodrick Burton

Allow me to state this disclaimer up front: you will not like this article, but it will make sense.

Recent technological advances have enabled the public to instantly register their approval of movies, videos, art, music and people as well as instantly express their disapproval or disdain of an article, movie, video, song or person as well. This great power to reach so many people around the world is one of the great achievements in human history, but as the character Spider-Man stated, "With great power comes great responsibility."

It is easily observed that from the youth to the adults, from the average person to the celebrity, the power of social media is being used irresponsibly. The Hazelwood School District (and probably several others) is struggling to mitigate cyberbullying. Parents rightfully concerned about their children's wellbeing are demanding schools to police students' use of social me-

dia as weapons of torment.

Kids can be cruel and have always found ways to be mean, do I remember! Yet, now technology has enabled them to project meanness in a targeted and unrelenting way which includes the widest audience with each like, tweet or snap.

What is most troubling, the automatic, lightning-quick demands for denouncement, exclusion, expulsion, amplified outrage or assorted vengeance before any consideration, context or reflection takes place as soon as social media reports a current wrong – real or perceived.

Has anyone stopped to consider whether in their day to day life how it would feel if they had to face a hastily gathered audience of their coworkers, neighbors, and strangers gathered together shouting at them the instant they made a mistake and then immediately being fired, evicted or escorted away from their workplace or home?

In the court system at least there are op-

portunities to make your case and even after a judgment is rendered the opportunity is there to make an appeal. This is not the case in the world of social media.

Technology has allotted us a giant platform to be unforgetting and unforgiving, in an unthinking way. Maybe we need to sign out, sign off, unplug and think about our great responsibility to behave decently.

Rodrick Burton is the pastor of New Northside Missionary Baptist Church, a member of the St. Louis Metropolitan Clergy Coalition, the Ecumenical Leadership Council, St. Louis Initiative to Reduce Violence (SIRV), Voices for Early Childcare Programs and a field education mentor at Covenant Theological Seminary.



The opinions expressed in this column are the columnist's alone and do not reflect the opinion of the owners or staff of *Community News*.

Olympic Hopeful, Hazelwood Central Grad Visits Former School

2014 Hazelwood Central High School alumna Ashley Henderson visited her former school on Thursday, March 14. Henderson attended the school's college and career fair to speak to students. She is a world-class runner who recorded one of the fastest times in the world in the 100-meter sprint (10.98 seconds) in 2018.

After graduating from Hazelwood Central High School, she attended San Diego State University, where she holds several school track records. Henderson currently is training for the U.S. Olympic Trials in 2020.

NoCo Churches United Annual Youth Appreciation Dinner March 24

NCCU is having its Annual Youth Appreciation Dinner Ceremony on March 24 at 4 p.m. at Christian Hospital NE in the Paul F. Detrick Building Atrium. The speaker will be the newly elected State Senator Brian Williams and the Master of Ceremonies will be Mrs. Kimberly McKenzie, associate minister at Christ the King UCC under the Leadership of Rev. Traci D. Blackmon and director of communications and public relations for Hazelwood School District.

Music will be provided by Byron C. Thomas, recording artist from Fresno, CA. Tickets are \$20 each and table for eight is \$160. Please contact Barbara Thompson at 314-780-4464 or Rance Thomas at 314-238-6828. Students receiving awards this year :

Academic Achievement

- Geoffrey Hopping, Hazelwood West High School, nominated by Hazelwood Police Department, St. Ferdinand Catholic Church
- Kayla Kline, Hazelwood West High School, nominated by Hazelwood Police Department
- Bri'Yana Merrill, Hazelwood Central High School, True Redemption Center
- Sofia Robayo-Camargo, McCluer High School, U-City Family Church

Artistic Achievement

- Rex Hale, McCluer High School
- Demarcion Little, McCluer High School
- Ronmal Mottley, Hazelwood Central High School
- Paris Stone, McCluer High School, Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witness

Athletic Achievement

- Justin Robinson, Hazelwood West High School, nominated by Hazelwood Police Department

Community Service/Exemplary Citizenship

- Terrion Kendel Barfield, McCluer High School, nominated by Florissant Police Department
- Diamond Cannady, McCluer High School
- Jazmin Woodcox, McCluer High School
- Justis Woodcox, McCluer High School

Academic Achievement--Middle School (Grades 6-8)

- Ja'Nyah Goforth, Commons Lane Elementary School
- Roslyn Shin, Commons Lane Elementary School
- Lauren Sutton, Ferguson Middle School



The Independent News

Community/School Kudos

The students named to the Dean's List at Millikin University are **Mary Heyl** of Hazelwood and **Collin Schlapper** of Florissant

Susan Polgar was inducted into the U.S. Chess Hall of Fame Champion Chess Player, Coach of the Webster University Gorlok Chess Team and Head of the Susan Polgar Institute for Chess Excellence (SPICE) at Webster. The ceremony took place on March 18 at the Saint Louis Zoo.

"We are very proud of Susan Polgar for her achievements in the field of chess and induction into the U.S. Chess Hall of Fame. Under her leadership, the Webster chess team and our program at Webster have enjoyed unparalleled success," said President Elizabeth Stroble. "Because our players have proven themselves academically and in a global game that transcends continents and languages, they exemplify Webster's goal to prepare students to compete on the world stage."

Jada Turner of Florissant, has received the Copper Dome Scholarship and Residence Life Leadership Award to attend Southeast Missouri State University for the 2019-2020 academic year. She will be a 2019 graduate of Hazelwood Central High School.

Capital University announced **Taylor Gibbs** of Florissant was named to the Provost's List for the fall 2018 semester.

Florissant Valley Jaycees Foundation nominated **Sally Gacheru** of Hazelwood West High School to be their 2019 Jaycees Community Service Scholarship recipient.

TRACK AND FIELD • SEASON PREVIEW

BOYS ATHLETES TO WATCH

**Willie Johnson, senior**
East St. Louis

Won the New Balance Nationals Indoor emerging elite 400-meter championship in 48.39 seconds on March 10. Won AAU Jr. Olympic national championship in the 400 in August in a personal best 47.82 seconds. Was unable to compete in Illinois state postseason series after East St. Louis was disqualified from postseason.

**Brandon Miller, junior**
John Burroughs

A record-shattering phenom who routinely has set new world records for his age group. An eight-time 800-meter AAU Junior Olympic champion. Set the state record in the 800 last season with a personal-best time of 1 minute and 49.55 seconds. Two-time Class 3 champion in the 800 and reigning 1,600 champion. Reigning Post-Dispatch All-Metro boys track and field athlete of the year.

**Andrew O'Keefe, senior**
Granite City

The area's top returning distance runner, O'Keefe finished second in the Class 3A 1,600-meter state championship last season in 4 minutes and 11.68 seconds. Signed with NCAA Division II contender Adams State (Colo.). Was a first-team All-Metro selection.

**Justin Robinson, junior**
Hazelwood West

One of the nation's top sprinters, Robinson helped Team USA to a silver medal finish in the 1,600-meter relay at the World Under-20 Championships in July. He is the defending Class 5 200- and 400-meter state champion. Won the New Balance Nationals Indoor championship in the 400 earlier this month in a personal-best 46.55 seconds.

**Jameson Williams, senior**
Cardinal Ritter

Two-time defending Class 3 state champion in 300-meter hurdles, reigning 400-meter champion and the runner-up in the 100- and 200-meter dashes last season. Electric athlete with speed to burn, signed to play football at Ohio State University.

BOYS KEY DATES

ILLINOIS

Sectional meets: May 15-16
State meet: May 23-25 at Eastern Illinois University, Charleston

MISSOURI CLASSES 1-2

District meets: May 4
Sectional meets: May 11
State meet: May 17-18, Jefferson City High School

MISSOURI CLASSES 3-5

District meet: May 11
Sectional meets: May 18
State meet: May 24-25, Jefferson City High School

SPOTLIGHT

BEST OF THE BEST

Area's top athletes set lofty standard amidst best in nation, world

BY DAVID KVIDAHL
STLhighschoolsports.com

State titles. National championships. World records.

It looks like the progression of an elite youth athlete into an adult.

It's Brandon Miller's resume. He's a junior at John Burroughs.

State titles. A national championship and an Under-20 World Championship silver medal.

That's Justin Robinson's resume. He's a junior at Hazelwood West.

State titles, national championships and the distinction as the fastest freshman in the country.

That's Alicia Burnett's resume. She's a junior at Parkway North.

Led by this elite trio, the area is in the midst of a track and field talent boom. One that can compete on a global stage.

"As a whole St. Louis is underrated," Miller said. "I'm trying to help people see the talent we have here in St. Louis."

A hair shorter than 5-foot-8 and tipping the scales around 140-pounds, Miller doesn't cut an intimidating figure walking down the street. Put him on a track? He might as well be the Hulk.

Miller holds the world record times in the 800-meter race in the 13- and 14-year-old age groups. He's won his age group at the AAU Jr. Olympics in the 800 for eight consecutive years. Last May as a sophomore, he set the Missouri all-class record in the 800 when he finished in 1 minute and 49.55 seconds.

What do you do for an encore when you're 17 and the unquestioned top 800 runner in the country?

You go harder.
"This year I have to take it to the another level," Miller said. "I have to put my foot on the gas pedal."

That's a scary thought for the competition. Miller thrives on setting high standards and goals and then meeting them. Even though he did break the state's 800 record, he wasn't completely satisfied with his time. The accomplishment was nice, but it still gnaws at him he didn't quite do what he wanted.

"I wanted to go sub-1:49 last year," he said. "That's the goal for this year."

Miller has grown up on a track. He's lived and breathed track much of his young life. His mother, Angela, is an accomplished coach. This is what he does.

Robinson, 16, did not truly dig into track until his freshman year. Last school year he gave up football to focus



RANDY KEMP • Special to STLhighschoolsports.com

Hazelwood West's Justin Robinson (left) competes in the Class 5 400-meter during the Missouri Track and Field State Championships last season in Jefferson City. Robinson is part of an elite trio leading the area in a track and field boom.

on track and his development has taken off. Under the guidance of Hazelwood West assistant Sean Burris, another of the area's most accomplished coaches, Robinson has transitioned from raw talent into international phenomenon. He earned a place on Team USA's 1,600-meter relay team that competed at the Under-20 World Championships in Finland in July. It was Robinson, the only high school sophomore on the team, who turned in a wicked split of 44.7 seconds on the third leg that took the Americans from seventh place after a bad handoff between the first two legs and into medal contention. Team USA took silver.

He since has followed that up by winning the 400 at the New Balance Indoor National Championships in 46.55 — the fastest high school 400 time this year — on March 10. It's the first national championship for Robinson and a sign of things to come as the 5-foot-8 and 147-pound speedster continues to evolve from track novice.

"Coming into this season I'm more prepared physically and mentally," Robinson said. "I know what's expected of myself."

What does Robinson expect?

"I expect to be great," he said.

Miller and Robinson are dynamic. Burnett is right there with them. She went undefeated her freshman year at Fort Zumwalt South and swept her way to Class 4 state championships in the 100, 200 and 400. In the summer

between her freshman and sophomore year she was invited to the Brooks PR Invitational in Seattle and won the 100 in 11.92. She was the only freshman in the field.

Burnett transferred to Parkway North last year and was forced to sit out after she was not cleared to compete for the Vikings. Unable to run during the spring, she promptly went out in the summer and won the 100 at the AAU Jr. Olympics in a state-best time of 11.71.

It gets better. Four East St. Louis High athletes won national titles, too. Senior Willie Johnson took top honors at the New Balance Indoor National Championships in the Emerging Elite 400 field, which he won in 48.39. He adds that his collection that includes an AAU Jr. Olympic championship in the 400 last summer.

Johnson teamed with Marcus Lampley, Keontez Lewis and Andrew Johnson to win the 800 and 1,600-meter relays at New Balance Indoor National Championships, too.

"These young men have explosive speed and know how to perform under pressure," East St. Louis boys track coach Barry Malloyd said in a statement.

The track and field talent in the area has always been strong but it's never been better. This group, in particular, has proven it can run with the best of the best because it is the best of the best.

"We can compete with anyone in the country," Miller said.