

Dear President Marc Johnson and Athletic Director Doug Knuth,

My name is Zachary Duncan. I competed for the UNR rifle team from 2011-2015. I graduated in winter of 2015 with a degree in Secondary Education with an endorsement in mathematics. After teaching middle school math in Reno for a year, I moved back home to Washington State, where I currently teach middle school math and coach my former rifle team. Imagine my surprise on Saturday when I sat down and read an email stating that my alma matter was cutting the Nevada Rifle Team. To say I was displeased would be an understatement, but we will leave it at that. I would like to petition you to reverse your decision.

Mr. Knuth, I will address you first. I have had half a week to sit down and go through the statements that I read online, in your email, and what I have gathered up from conversations with members of the team. I want to first give you a little history of the status of the team when I arrived; specifically, some events that occurred before your tenure at the University. About a year before I started, the current range for the team was demolished, to make room for the seismic lab that was constructed at the University. Much of our equipment was lost, and Coach had to scramble to find a working range, with little help from the University. Although he can provide far more details than I can about the event, what I can tell is that when I arrived in 2011, we had an air rifle facility at the University but no smallbore range. As you are well-aware, men and women shoot 60 shots each of both smallbore and air rifle. For my first year on the team, we had no smallbore range whatsoever, and the only live fire practice we got was with our air rifles. While both individual disciplines are similar, no team can be expected to compete seriously without a smallbore range, as it handicaps your ability to practice and prevents the possibility of any home matches. Despite that enormous obstacle, in the 2011-2012 season, the Nevada Rifle team managed to not only qualify for the NCAA's, they finished 5th place at the championship in the smallbore event, the only team there without a smallbore range, a team with probably 1/10 the budget of any of their competitors at the championship. When I began my sophomore year, Coach put two sets of shipping containers out near the baseball field, giving us four firing points to shoot in. Not exactly your ideal set-up, but we managed. Eventually we added a third set my junior year, and while it was not a range by most people's standards, it gave us the ability to train in smallbore again, and to once again compete in home matches. Our team was never fully funded, as Coach Harvey donated his salary to the team, and we were forced to shoot in only the minimum number of matches a year due to travel costs. Our equipment was also lacking; for example, we could not afford full sets of good quality shooting jackets and pants for even our travel squad, let alone anyone else. We needed new rifles as well. And yet, despite all of this, the team continued to excel on the range and in the classroom. And then, after two years, things began looking up.

I remember sitting in legacy hall in 2013 when you were interviewed by athletes and supporters of Nevada athletics. I was excited by what I heard in the room, and as I continued throughout my season as a Nevada athlete, times looked good for the rifle team. We had begun receiving major support for our team from the Safari Club (courtesy of Terry Melby), Jerry Cail had taken over fundraising from athletics side for our team, and by and large we had your support. I can recall you attending the event put on by the Nevada Big Horns association, as they were kind enough to offer us major support and a space to raise awareness for our team. Even though we were still shooting in shipping containers when I left Nevada, it looked like we would get our range with time, thanks in large part again to the Safari club and efforts by many other supporters. I left Reno in 2016, confident that

things, while not perfect for the team, were looking up. We were shooting great, our academics were high, and were much more well known around campus and in the community.

To be honest Mr. Knuth, I feel disheartened. I highly doubt that you were the sole decision maker in this, but I would like to know how hard you fought for the team. After Coach spent all this time the last year trying to find a place to shoot air rifle (as we lost our space in the genomics building), and after the team brought on six new freshmen, the team learned on Saturday, (before finals had been completed I might add) that the team was being cut. To add insult to injury, there are two members from Washington State, (one from my team), both who are freshman and who are shooting the best scores of their life. They are attending the University of Nevada in large part due to my positive experience at the University and with the team. Now they, and every other member on the rifle team, get to decide if they will stay at UNR and complete their degree (thus giving up their dream of shooting) or they must now try and obtain membership on another team, incurring great expense financially and emotionally, if they are even able to do this. The upperclassman can forget about this as a real possibility. As to the notion that the sport will continue as an ASUN club, that idea is not an option, plain and simple. There are very few serious college club rifle teams out there, let alone any within the Nevada region. Stripping the team of their NCAA status prevents any future shooting for the team.

President Johnson, I will address you now. I had a wonderful time at the University of Nevada. I have become an excellent secondary teacher in mathematics, and I owe a large part of that to the University of Nevada. I attended UNR with the goal of obtaining a degree in teaching while pursuing the Olympic sport that I loved, and now coach today. You made a statement online that after you did a “thorough evaluation of our intercollegiate athletics program” that you felt that cutting the rifle team and adding a Men’s Cross Country team “best represent[ed] Wolf Pack athletics in the current intercollegiate athletics landscape.” The article online cited the fact that there are only 23 Division 1 schools that sponsor a rifle team, and thus rifle shooting “has struggled to maintain its place” within the NCAA. And you know what? That is true. Over the last two decades many Universities have shut down their NCAA rifle team programs. This is exactly the reason why you should **not** be cancelling the rifle program. Mr. Knuth made the comment in his email out to the alumni of this rifle team that rifle is a sport that is not supported by the Mountain West Conference. To which I reply, so what? I do not believe for a second that these are the real reasons for shutting down the team, as the University never fully funded the team from the beginning. So I doubt it is for financial reasons; paying a men’s cross country coach a competitive salary alone is more than the budget of the entire rifle team.

And now I address you both. I would like the two of you to consider whose team it really is. Because it is not yours. It is Coach Harvey’s. Over 20 years ago, he turned that team from an ROTC team into a full- fledged NCAA Rifle program. That man has spent countless years dedicating his time, money, and energy to that team. He brought the team into existence, a team that has appeared multiple times at the NCAA championships. Members of his team have belonged to the USA national team, with the goal of making the Olympics. Not only that, he has demanded only the highest academic standards from his team, refusing to take some of the best shooters in the country if he was not convinced they could achieve a 3.5 or better at the University. Coach is a true embodiment of the idea that the student comes before the athlete, as his goal was to prepare his athletes for grad school. He has endured many hardships with the team (starting with the demolition of the original range) and yet has managed to keep the team thriving, despite what would have been overwhelming obstacles for nearly

anyone else. He needs to leave on his own terms, not the University's. I owe a great deal to that man, and I cannot sit by quietly and watch this happen to both him and the team.

And then there are the shooters themselves. You are eliminating a sport which we truly enjoy, a sport where we have spent countless hours for years on end to achieve success at. It is also the most equitable sport on the planet. Rifle is the only NCAA sport where men and women compete on an equal playing field, and where women are arguably better than men. For years the Nevada team has been largely made up of mostly women. You can be athletic or non-athletic in the traditional sense of the word. Shooters are short, skinny, tall, stocky or anything in-between, and still excel at the sport. How many sports can say that anyone truly can do it, and that your body-shape, gender, and athletic abilities do not matter? And yet we train like any other sport, demanding many hours of physical training and mental preparation, in addition to the hours spent on the range. For those of us who compete and coach in the sport, rifle means everything to us.

I apologize for the length of this letter, but given my current out of state residence, I felt it best to express my thoughts in this letter. I ask that you take my comments seriously and consider what is the right thing to do. Please reinstate the team for the coming future.

Sincerely,

Zachary Duncan

Alumni of UNR, former member and captain of the Nevada Rifle Team

Current coach of the Capitol City Rifle team, WA state.