

[Intro Music]

NATE SANFORD: It's Thursday May 6th and you're listening to The ForeFront. It's a new weekly podcast about the stories you need to know this week, produced by The Front, an independent student newsroom covering campus, Bellingham, and Whatcom County.

LAUREN GALLUP: This week, we're joined by sports editor Nathan Schumock. He's going to be getting us up to speed on what Western athletics are up to this season.

SANFORD: But first, here's what else is going on.

[End Intro Music]

ACTOR: So, this is hell. I'd never have believed it. Remember all the stories they told us about the fire and brimstone and the torture chambers and the burning null? Old wives tales. There's no need for red Hot pokers. Hell is other people.

SANFORD: So, Lauren, what are we listening to right now?

GALLUP: We've listened to a 1964 BBC adaptation of a play called *No Exit*. It's an existentialist, played by Jean-Paul Sartre. And it caused a bit of drama and the drama department recently.

SANFORD: And since you're a former theater student, could you maybe walk us through what some of that drama was?

GALLUP: Yeah. So, in March, Western's Theatre Department announced that *No Exit* had been chosen as the play they would do for this department's main fall production. The play is about three people trapped in a room in hell together. It's actually a somewhat well-known play probably the most famous line from it is "hell is other people."

But it also has a number of themes that some students in the department said they were uncomfortable with. And so, a third year student actually started a petition asking that the department reevaluate its decision to put on that play this fall.

SANFORD: And so, what were some of those themes they found problematic?

GALLUP: Well, the play itself was published in 1944. And in the petition, they talked about how one of the characters in the play is portrayed as this very shallow sort of the female stereotype who spends the whole play begging for a man's attention. And then the petition also talks about how this other character perpetuates this really harmful stereotype of a predatory lesbian.

There's this character who kind of spends the whole play making unwanted sexual advances towards other women. And the petition basically says they're worried about how the play will perpetuate these harmful stereotypes and not give audiences proper context.

SANFORD: Right, yeah. And I remember our previous Campus News Editor, Emily Feek, wrote an article about the petition about a month ago. And it seems like it got quite a few signatures. But how did the actual theater department respond to that?

GALLUP: Right, so the petition got sent to the department and on April 6, faculty and staff responded officially to the petition. They announced that they're going to continue with the production next fall. The response said that while audiences mount may interpret art in different ways, they believe the depictions and *No Exit* are not harmful or repressive enough to warrant removal from the upcoming performance season.

And Kate Yeoman, a Campus News reporter with The Front, wrote about the department's reaction. She talked with Kitt Spicer, the Dean of the College of Fine and Performing Arts, and he said the conversations with students about the play were respectful, and both sides were informative. And the students who wrote the petition told The Front the same thing.

And part of the response, the Department announced that in the 2022 to 2023 season, a student representative will be elected to help the faculty decide that year's play.

SANFORD: So-so it sounds like that, well, the department is still moving forward with the play, they did still spend quite a lot of time talking with students about their concerns. And my impression is that by having a student representative help make the decision for next year's play, they're trying to kind of avoid having the situation happen again.

GALLUP: Exactly. It seems like they're trying to acknowledge that students might have concerns and wanting to have more say in what the department is putting on for productions.

SANFORD Interesting. And you know, as being part of the Editorial Staff at The Front, I spend a lot of time looking at the emails and comments people send us. And I'll just say that when we publish the original story about the petition back in late March, we got a much stronger reaction than I was expecting.

And I think there were there were a lot of older Western graduates who kind of felt like this was sort of this classic kind of case of oversensitive college students and political correctness run amok and all of that. And it speaks to this kind of broader cultural moment, you know, we're experiencing with all these kind of older cultural artifacts that are being re-examined under a much more critical lens.

That-that said, You-you remember, one of the emails we got was actually kind of funny. It was a Western grad who wrote to The Front to say that Western students nowadays are a bunch of quote, "tender flowers." And they're using it as a stand in for a "special snowflake," but in a different context, I think that's actually really sweet and they basically see President Randhawa and everything.

GALLUP: Right. It's definitely an interesting term that I've never heard before. But again, it sounds like, you know, the students, they created this petition talked about as a student body and got to have a really good conversation with the department. So hopefully in the end, everyone's happy with the ultimate decision. It'll be interesting to see what the department does with the production this fall.

[Transition Music]

CITY COUNCIL MEMBER: All right, final hearing this evening is agenda Bill 22953. This is a public hearing to consider a hazard pay ordinance for grocery workers.

SANFORD: Last week, the Bellingham City Council passed an ordinance that is going to require grocery stores to pay workers in additional \$4 an hour in hazard pay. The ordinance only applies to stores with over 10,000 square feet and more than 40 employees. And it's been in the works for a while, it's modeled after similar hazard pay ordinances that passed earlier this year, in places like Burien and Seattle. And before the vote, members of the public appeared before the council to voice their support for the ordinance.

MARK AURENBACH: Thank you President Stone and council members. My name is Mark Aurenbach. I'm speaking for UFCW 21. Our union represents about 1200 grocery workers of Fred Meyer, Safeway, and Hagen in Bellingham. For more than a year, our members have been showing up every day and doing exactly what experts are telling the rest of us not to do—spending their whole day indoors interacting with hundreds or 1000s of strangers. This has been a year of danger and stress for workers and record profits for grocery corporations.

SANFORD: Those record profits that mark is talking about, they're pretty astronomical. The Brookings Institute did an analysis of major corporations like Costco, CVS, Walmart, and Kroger. They found that the top retail companies have seen massive gains this year, an average increase of about \$16.7 billion. That's a roughly 40% increase in profits. And stock prices are up 33%. But for the frontline workers employed by those companies, wages have increased by just \$1.11 on average.

SPEAKER 1: The same mandates that enrich these companies effectively drafted frontline grocery workers into essential work, keeping our communities safe, and significant physical and psychological risk to themselves and their families.

SANFORD: City news reporter Kelton Burns has been covering the story for a while. And he spoke with some grocery store workers in the Bellingham area for this story. And they all told him similar things about how after more than a year on the front lines dealing with panic shoppers and anti-maskers, \$4 an hour seems like the least grocery stores can do. And a number of grocery store workers also appeared before the council to say the same thing.

SPEAKER 2: This is not the job any of us signed up for and we certainly don't get paid enough for the risk and the stress.

SANFORD: After more than a year of the pandemic, the ordinance almost feels a little late. Lisa Anderson, who proposed the bill, said that much of the delay came because they had to see if the legality would hold up in other cities.

LISA ANDERSON: I kind of feel like I really live at the table. I would have loved to have had this come back last September, but you know, just doing due diligence to see how it weaves through the courts by wanting to make sure that it was upholding legally through people who ventured into this first.

SANFORD: After hearing from more supporters and a few opponents of the ordinance, the City Council unexpectedly moved to vote on the bill. The final vote was 6-2 with Gene Knutson and Pinky Vargas in opposition. In explaining his vote, Knutson acknowledged that grocery stores have been making record profits during the pandemic. He just doesn't see that as a reason for the City Council to get involved.

Knutson also told The Front that he doesn't believe it's the council's job to get involved in labor disputes. He also said that he worries about the effect the ordinance could have on Fred Meyer, which is currently looking for a new location to build a store.

GENE KNUTSON: This does not send a good message to them that we would want a third store in Bellingham. So, I've said all I'm gonna say. I've taken a lot of personal heat over this, but that's just the way it is, it comes with the job. I just feel that we're going down a road we shouldn't be going down because it won't stop after this.

SANFORD: Despite his premonitions, the measure passed, and it'll go into effect next week.

GALLUP: Reporting for the No Exit story was done by Kate Yeoman. Kelton burns wrote about the hazard pay ordinance, and you can read more about their stories and others on our website, WesternFrontOnline.com.

SANFORD Up next we'll be speaking with sports editor Nathan Schumock, about what's been going on with Western athletics and what you need to be on the lookout for in this coming season.

[Transition Music]

GALLUP: Hi, Nathan, thanks so much for joining us today.

NATE SCHUMOCK Hi, thanks for having me.

SANFORD: Yeah. So, Nathan, you're The Front's Sports Editor, and you've been covering, you know, Western athletics for a while. And basically, since Lauren and I don't know much about sports, we were kind of hoping we could check in and you could help explain, you know, what Western has been up to when it comes to sports and what we should be watching for and the 2020-2021 season.

SCHUMOCK: Yeah, so it's been it's been great having everyone back out, you know, playing their sports because you know, everything shut down, obviously, because of COVID. So all these athletes were, you know, they weren't playing for like a year. And even when we did restart up there were so many bumps in the road. But it's great. All-all sports are back, every spring sport, the only people aren't- that aren't playing right now are basketball. But softball, soccer, volleyball, they're all rolling.

GALLUP: Right. So, what did that look like? I mean, you said there were some bumps in the roads for sports, like restarting. What was that whole restart process like and where are we at now?

SCHUMOCK: So, at the beginning of last quarter, they got approved to restart practice. So rowing, basketball, volleyball, track, all those guys went back to practice. And just like a week later, there was a COVID outbreak, it got re-shut down. They had to wait two weeks, all the athletes were super bummed. I think we did a story about that last quarter.

And then finally, they got, you know, all the cases went back down, and they got to start participating again. And there was a big GNAC meeting, which is the conference that Western's in, and all the presidents were there. And, and they voted to bring sports back. The only GNAC team not competing is Simon Fraser. And that's because they literally can't, they're in Canada, so they can't come back and forth. But right now everything is rolling. Everything's going pretty well. I think there's been some cancellations that have been due to COVID and other circumstances that we're not aware of, but on Western's ends, everything's going pretty good.

SANFORD: That's awesome. And what do games look like right now? Are our fans like allowed in any capacity?

SCHUMOCK: So, the GNAC- or GNAC said that no fans are allowed. I imagine that rolls through all spring sports. I know that since we're kind of getting into phase three, maybe it'll be a little bit adjustment, but I wouldn't- I wouldn't bet on it. But there's just there's just like statistics people, commentators, all the staff, but no fans allowed. But if you do want to watch Western's, games, they're all available on the western athletics website. And you just go to schedule for whatever sport you're looking for. And then there'll be a link to Viking TV, which is where all of our streams are. So, you can watch all the games and, you know, live time follow along.

GALLUP: Right. That's great information. And I have to wonder, what's it like for Western athletes that haven't been competing for a year at this point to come back?

SCHUMOCK: I think there might have been a bit of a curve just like conditioning wise, but on paper, they're- they're doing really well. I think our sports- or a few of our teams are thriving. They've, they're like, you know, near the tops of their standings, like softball, they've been on a run. They're 18 and 10, I think. And they're rolling right now they have a big series kind of coming up this weekend, that'll decide their position in the standings. And then after that, there'll be the GNAC championships.

Golf just did the GNAC championships, women won, or they won the whole thing. So now they are going to Texas to play in the NCAA tournament, which is exciting.

GALLUP: That is exciting!

SCHUMOCK: But I think considering all the circumstances that athletes have done a really good job adjusting and, you know, following all the rules, protocols, and all that stuff. I know, it's been kind of hard because, you know, everyone wants to be with each other. But it's not always super easy during a pandemic.

SANFORD: Yeah, and you were a sports reporter last quarter. And you got to go to one of the first- the first games that like actually was back in person again. What-what was that like?

SCHUMOCK: Yeah, it was, it was awesome. Because, you know, I started out as a reporter in during the pandemic, so I've done only, you know, zoom interviews, phone interviews, and you know, that's fine, but it's not like being there. So, I got to go to the- I got to go to two women's basketball games. Got to, you know, sit in like the front row, watch those. I got to talk to some of the players and coach afterwards and I had a lot of fun. It was definitely a different experience being there in person compared to talking to people over the phone because you know, everything kind of just feels the same. But you know, when you're actually there, it's- it's a lot of fun.

SANFORD: That's awesome.

GALLUP: And you've already mentioned this a little bit, but I just would like to hear how all our different teams are doing, how the seasons are going.

SCHUMOCK: Yeah. So, I already mentioned softball a bit, but they're doing really well. They went into a bit of a slump last week. I think they dropped a few games. But if they take care of Central this weekend, they'll be right back in it.

Soccer they had a- women's soccer had a crazy, crazy game yesterday. They- they were down like 2-0, within 20 minutes and then they came back, scored three goals in a row. And then SPU tied it up again, but with 15 seconds left Western got a tip in and tied up the game. So that was very cool and ended in a tie. But you know how soccer is sometimes? They only have like seven games, I think so they don't have as much, you know, volume as other sports, I think will- they will do pretty well, though.

And our volleyball team's incredible. Two years ago, they were second in the country, I think. And they're 5-0 right now. They lost their first game this weekend. But I mean, that's just a little hiccup. Otherwise, they've been outstanding. We had a story about that. Last week, one of our reporters was able to go to the game. And she did a great job.

Same with men's soccer, we got a reporter there. They're 1-1, they're doing pretty well. They don't have as many games as well- I think they only have five games total. So, they don't get to play as much. I'm not really sure who decided the schedules and why some teams play more than others. But it's going pretty well.

GALLUP: Does that have to do with COVID restrictions for the different allotment of games in the season?

SCHUMOCK: You know what, I'm not sure. Because like, women's basketball, they only played six games. And they went 6-0 in those games, but I never really understood why they didn't get to play as many Cause like, softball plays- is playing a full season. I think they have like 30 games total or something like that- close to it. And I'm not exactly sure why some teams have more games than others. But at least you know, everyone- everyone's back playing, which is just what is most important, I think.

GALLUP: Right, for sure. And I guess I'm curious, too. This is something I've thought about a lot this year in the pandemic with different restrictions. You know, when you're playing sports, it's different, right? Yeah. And you're maybe coming into contact with people and such. So, what are the protocols right now while we still have outbreaks in the community and not everyone's vaccinated?

SCHUMOCK: I think it's different for most sports. They have to wear masks on the bench, and in like the dugouts and stuff, but when they're on the field, like for soccer and volleyball, I do not believe they have to wear masks on the court because I think that would clog up their breathing a bit. But they're just supposed to stay like-or try and stay six feet apart as best they can. It's very difficult when you're playing a team sport, you kind of have to be close to people. But I think in softball, they were a mask in the fields or at least they have them on their on their person. And if they need to put them on, they can. But yeah, just no fans there. They're trying to keep- oh, everyone gets- everyone has to get tested once a week or once every two weeks. And if they

don't get it back, like a negative test, they're not allowed to compete. They have to quarantine all that stuff.

GALLUP: Just another one of those pandemic balancing acts, right?

SCHUMOCK: Yeah, it's hard to tiptoe sometimes.

GALLUP: Yeah.

SCHUMOCK: But so far so good. This quarter, I don't think there's been any problems on Western's side. So that's great.

SANFORD: And then I was curious, too, about if there any- any new players or any kind of things that you're particularly watching this quarter that we could be keeping an eye out for.

SCHUMOCK: One player who's just electric every time I watch her is Anna Kastner, she's the ace of the softball team. She does both- she hits and she pitches, and she's like 9-2. She threw a perfect game this quarter, which- a couple weeks ago, which you know, a very rare occurrence in softball and baseball. She has like a two ERA, 100 strikeouts, and she also is batting over 300 with like 50 at bats. So, she's been killing it.

And we just had a story about Jaden DeBoer? I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing his name, right. But he was one of the state players of the year in Arizona. Regional, most outstanding player, and he went to Lynden High School. Then he went to Arizona for his last year of high school. And now he's coming back to Western. So, he'll be a huge addition for the men's team next year. And unfortunately, they didn't get to play this year because they decided to opt out. But they should come back, you know, full force next year.

GALLUP: Well, thanks so much for answering our questions about Western sports. Is there anything that you want to add?

SCHUMOCK: I don't think so. But I really appreciate you guys having me on.

SANFORD: Yeah, definitely. We will keep an eye on all those games later. Awesome.

GALLUP: Thank you so much.

SCHUMOCK: Thank you.

[Transition Music]

GALLUP: Nathan is The Front's Sports Editor. You can follow his team coverage on our website WesternFrontOnline.com You can also follow us on our Instagram at [WesternFrontOnline](https://www.instagram.com/WesternFrontOnline) and on Twitter at [TheFrontOnline](https://twitter.com/TheFrontOnline). And we're also on Facebook.

SANFORD: This episode was written and hosted by me Nate Sanford. I'm the Editor-in-Chief of The Front.

GALLUP: And me, Lauren Gallup, I'm The Front's Managing Editor.

SANFORD: Nolan Baker is our Chief Audio Editor and Producer. Emily Bishop and Kyle Tubbs are the Assistant Producers. Nolan Baker and I also wrote and recorded the music for this podcast.

GALLUP: Thanks so much for listening. We'll be here next week.

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