



The Oregonian

A look at what Oden stands for

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Last week, less than two hours after the news of Greg Oden's endorsement of Sen. Barack Obama for president made it on to OregonLive, someone scribbled in the comments, "Disappointed in Oden -- thought he stood for some other things."

As closed-minded as that might be, it was not atypical. Politics is a contact sport, and woe the citizen who goes wading into it without proper protection. But since it was raised, let's show you just what Greg Oden stands for.

Tuesday, exactly a week after taking a call from the Illinois senator, Greg Oden was in front of a group of kids, business types and the commissioner of the NBA to launch Team Oden, a program designed to help attract volunteers to Oregon Mentors.

What a terrible thing to stand for.

"Time for me to start giving back," he said. He talked about his mentors and his mother, and how she was on her way here next week to take care of the mohawk. He joked about Team Oden's logo: his silhouette, holding a ball above two children. "It's kind of mean," he said. "I'm not even giving them the ball."

As Oden sat down, David Stern stood up, pointed and clapped.

On the eve of Tuesday's primaries, a post on the sports blog Deadspin noted Oden's endorsement of Obama. "We're once again confronted with the notion that we're supposed to care what athletes', or for that matter any celebrity's, views on politics are."

This is a popular, if confusing, complaint. No one's being forced to care about anything. Care or don't as you please. It continues to boggle the mind, however, how scared we are of other people's opinions, as if Oden's thoughts on presidential politics will somehow alter yours, as if he has a mystical celebrity mind-meld on the populace.

If he really had that power, we'd all dress a little sharper. Only George Clooney can do that.

And anyhow, who decides who's fit to comment? Was there a vote? Greg Oden went to Ohio State for a year and went to the NBA. Rush Limbaugh went to Southeast Missouri State for a year and eventually ended up in Kansas City selling tickets for the Royals.

After signing piles of autographs and posing for countless photos Tuesday night, Oden said he had only read the good comments on his blog at Yardbarker.com. After four days, when the comments were still arriving, he said he figured it was best not to read. True to form, reasonable debate slipped into the muck of the day. Good move to stay above it.

Team Oden's goal, as announced Tuesday, is to help find mentors for 40,000 Oregon children by 2010. Oden stood up and made that quite clear.

"Good will come out of this," he said.

That's what Oden stands for.

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