

News Writing

Region Meet • 2018



You are a reporter for the League-town **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write a **news story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **45 minutes**. Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number NOT YOUR NAME on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School, located in Texas, has 750 students enrolled in grades 9-12. In March, cheerleader sponsor Barbie Denver was suspended after a senior on the girls' varsity basketball team posted a video of Denver pushing a cheerleader down into the splits while the cheerleader was pleading with her to stop. The basketball team was waiting to use the gym. The video was posted to a Twitter account and went viral after only two days, receiving more than 100,000 views. Since then, the local media and multiple national news outlets have covered the story.

Markie Murry, the cheerleader, suffered torn muscle tissue and ligaments, and her right hamstring was pulled, according to her doctor. She is now under the care of a physical therapist.

A former Dallas Cowboy cheerleader, Denver has been the squad coach and a physical education teacher at the school for six years. Last year the varsity squad won second at the state competition, a first for the school.

Drill team sponsor Cindi Dott will coach the cheerleaders until the end of the school year. The squad will travel to Fort Worth in May for a national competition. Six seniors and four juniors are on the varsity squad.

Denver's lawyer, Leah Walker, said her client's actions were typical for teaching someone how to do the splits. Denver has not spoken to the media since she was suspended. The school board will discuss Denver and her possible termination at its next board meeting, Tuesday, April 24. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, April 17.

■ DUNCAN SUSSEN, superintendent

"No administrator or coach had any knowledge that this practice was going on with our cheerleaders. Had we known, we would have stopped it immediately. In no way do we condone this type of teaching or training.

"As soon as we were made aware of the video and situation, the administration took action. I cannot respond to what the future holds for Ms. Denver."

■ MARKIE MURRY, junior

"I am still upset that Carey [Wright] posted that video to her Twitter account. This whole thing has been totally embarrassing. Carey said she did it to help me, but she could have shown the principal the video and helped me just the same. That video was on CNN, Fox News and several other media websites. Millions of people have seen me crying and begging Coach Denver to stop pushing me.

"I do think Coach Denver was wrong in how she was teaching me, but I don't think she should be fired or put in jail. When my brother was in high school, he told me how his coaches would run the boys until they puked. That's way more dangerous than what Coach Denver did to me. People think I started all of this. I didn't. I want it all to end."

■ SANDY MURRY, Markie's mother

"I had no idea Coach Denver was pushing the cheerleaders into the splits. Markie never told me anything. I am livid. My daughter was injured and now has to go to physical therapy twice a week. Coach Denver should never be allowed to work with children again."

■ CINDI DOTT, drill team coach and new cheerleader coach

"I have experience coaching cheerleaders at my former school. I will say that to be on drill team, the girls should be able to do the splits, but I don't force them into the splits if they can't. That's pretty barbaric. Coach Denver is highly competitive and wanted to bring home the wins, but you can't do it like that."

■ LEAH WALKER, lawyer

"This whole thing has been blown way out of proportion. The media has sensationalized the situation and made Ms. Denver out to be some kind of sadist. She is a serious coach who got serious results from her team. The district attorney is threatening charges, but he doesn't have a case. He's grandstanding for the media."

■ CAREY WRIGHT, senior and girls' basketball captain

"Markie won't even talk to me anymore because of the video I posted. I had no idea that all of this would happen because of the video. I thought Coach Denver was wrong for what she did, and that is why I posted the video."

■ CHARLIE DOUGLASS, senior and girls' cheerleader captain

"I feel bad for Markie. We didn't want Coach Denver fired, but we didn't like some of her coaching techniques. I wish the administration would have warned her or something. She was a good coach most of the time, and we are an award-winning team because of her. I wasn't happy with what she did to Markie, but she didn't do things like that all of the time.

"I think the football coaches are much tougher on their teams than Coach Denver was on us."

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ron Yamgucci, the district attorney, said he will announce Thursday whether or not he will charge Denver with injury to a child, a Class A misdemeanor. If charged and convicted, Denver could face up to one year in jail and a \$4,000 fine.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

REGION • 2018

NEWS WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. Open with the newest information. In this instance, the district attorney's announcement is Thursday.

Cheerleader sponsor Barbie Denver may face charges of injury to a child after a video was posted on Twitter of Denver pushing a squad member down into the splits while the cheerleader pleaded with her to stop. On Thursday, the district attorney will make his decision.

The following week, April 24, the school board will decide if it will fire Denver.

2. Use direct quotes and get those quotes high in the story. After you introduce quotes, use the transition/quote formula. Be sure you attribute after the quote or at least after the first sentence. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Murry said," not "said Murry.") Avoid stacking quotes. Avoid putting two or more quotes together without placing a transition between them. Also, make sure transitions tell information to help the action of the story and the quote does not repeat information revealed in the transition.

transition

The video, shot and posted by a varsity basketball player, went viral after two days with multiple national news outlets covering the story.

direct quote

"I had no idea that all of this would happen because of the video," senior Carey Wright said. "I thought Coach Denver was wrong for what she did, and that is why I posted the video."

transition

Junior Markie Murry, the cheerleader in the video, suffered torn muscle tissue and ligaments and her right hamstring is pulled.

direct quote

"This whole thing has been totally embarrassing," Murry said. "That video was on CNN, Fox News and several other media websites. Millions of people have seen me crying and begging Coach Denver to stop pushing me. People think I started all of this. I didn't. I want it all to end."

3. Use third person. Don't say "our student" or "Duncan Sussen, our superintendent" or "Some of our students..." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "Denver is awful..." without attributing that quote to someone. These statements are personal opinion and cannot be made in a news story.

4. Note how in the earlier example of transition/quote, each quote is its own paragraph. Don't be frightened away from using one- and two-sentence paragraphs. Journalistic writing consists mostly of brief paragraphs.

SAMPLE STORY

Cheerleader sponsor Barbie Denver may face charges of injury to a child after a video was posted on Twitter of Denver pushing a squad member into the splits while the cheerleader pleaded with her to stop. On Thursday, the district attorney will make his decision.

On April 24, the school board will decide if it will fire Denver, who has been on suspension since the incident came to light.

“No administrator or coach had any knowledge that this practice was going on with our cheerleaders,” Superintendent Duncan Sussen said. “Had we known, we would have stopped it immediately.”

The video, shot and posted by a varsity basketball player, went viral and multiple national news outlets covered the story.

“I had no idea that all of this would happen because of the video,” senior Carey Wright said. “I thought Coach Denver was wrong for what she did, and that is why I posted the video.”

Junior Markie Murry, the cheerleader in the video, suffered torn muscle tissue and ligaments and her right hamstring is pulled.

“This whole thing has been totally embarrassing,” Murry said. “That video was on CNN, Fox News and several other media websites. Millions of people have seen me crying and begging Coach Denver to stop pushing me. People think I started all of this. I didn’t. I want it all to end.”

If charged and convicted, Denver could face up to one year in jail and a \$4,000 fine.

“I am livid,” Sandy Murry, Markie’s mom, said. “I had no idea Coach Denver was pushing the cheerleaders into the splits. My daughter was injured and now has to go to physical therapy twice a week. Coach Denver should never be allowed to work with children again.”

While Denver is suspended, drill team coach Cindi Dott has taken over the squad and will travel with them to competition in May.

“I have experience coaching cheerleaders at my former school,” Dott said. “I will say that to be on drill team, the girls should be able to do the splits, but I don’t force them into the splits if they can’t. That’s pretty barbaric.”

Denver, a former Dallas Cowboy cheerleader, has been the squad coach and a physical education teacher at the school for six years.

“We didn’t want Coach Denver fired, but we didn’t like some of her coaching techniques,” senior cheer captain Charlie Douglass said. “I wish the administration would have warned her or something. She was a good coach most of the time, and we are an award-winning team because of her.”

The varsity squad won second at the state competition last year, a first for the school.

“This whole thing has been blown way out of proportion,” Denver’s lawyer, Leah Walker said. “The media has sensationalized the situation and made Ms. Denver out to be some kind of sadist. She is a serious coach who got serious results from her team.”

Since the incident appeared on Twitter and Denver was suspended, she has not spoken to any media.