

Bomb threat puts tax decision on hold

Media General News Service

RALEIGH — Action on a plan to raise taxes by \$1.1 billion over the next two years was abruptly stopped by a bomb threat Monday night that emptied the Legislative Building before the state House could take up the proposal.

"Everyone quietly leave the building — right now," House Speaker Jim Black sternly ordered House members at 6:33 p.m.

Authorities reopened the building about 9:45. The building quickly emptied as about 300 legislators, staff members, lobbyists and reporters tumbled out.

Cameras for UNC-TV left their cameras rolling on the empty House floor to document any disruption. Black adjourned the House session while standing on top of a planter outside the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences across the street from the Legislative Building.

"Don't go back in there," Black told the crowd. "There is a very serious threat that there is a bomb in the building that will go off. That's the report that came from the sheriff and the Capitol Police."

Black said he was told by a legislative sergeant at arms that the Wake County Sheriff's Department had received the call and relayed it to the State Capitol Police.

The threat followed reports that were spreading through the Triangle at the time that a device had been discovered outside a dormitory at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill yesterday and detonated by an SBI bomb team. As the Capitol Police blocked off streets surrounding the Legislative Building and an SBI bomb squad arrived with a bomb-sniffing dog to search the property, there was a mixture of fear, disgust and gallows humor in the crowd of legislators and staff across the street.

But even the most seasoned veterans said they couldn't recall such an event occurring before.

"History in the making," said Sen. Allen Wellons, D-Johnston. "I just hope it's nothing precedent-setting. We're having a hard enough time getting out."

House Minority Whip

Frank Mitchell, R-Iredell said, "I don't ever recall hearing about a legislature having to abandon the building during debate. I guess the State Capitol Police will be put back in the budget now."

Some recalled an anti-tax protest in Tennessee this summer where protesters broke windows at the state capitol. Others recalled that an audit of security measures at the Legislative Building by the U.S. Secret Service in April found a variety of lapses.

Some legislators said they couldn't leave because their cellphones, keys and computers were still inside the building.

Black joked that his golf clubs were still in his car parked under the building. And Rep. Rex Baker, R-Stokes, spied a stable rat scampering across the state seal in front of the building. "The rats are leaving the building," he observed.

Other members — including some who oppose the proposed tax increase — said they were disgusted by the bomb threat.

"Raising taxes is serious business. Calling in bomb threats is serious business," said Rep. Mitch Gillespie, R-McDowell. "I hate that we've come to this point. You go to the ballot box to solve your differences... I hate it."

As members of the state Senate arrived for their Monday evening session, the Senate chaplain, the Rev. Mike Morris, prayed outside the science museum at the request of Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight.

Morris said that legislators are accustomed to verbal abuse. "But this is much more than they would ever bargain for. It is unfair. It is dangerous. And we certainly pray that no one will be injured."

"It is said that out of adversity there is a coming together," Morris prayed. "We pray that will happen in this situation."

Basnight said he isn't sure that the legislature can adopt security measures to prevent such threats. "You couldn't prepare against this," he said.

"We've watched this happen in schools across North Carolina. If someone calls in, you have to get out."

The threat followed a week-end of heavy lobbying both for

and against a tax plan that would raise \$444 million for the state this year and \$654 million next year, chiefly by raising the sales tax statewide from 6 percent to 7 percent.

Rep. Wilma Sherrill, R-Buncombe, one of the Republicans targeted by tax opponents, said she received 300 e-mail messages over the weekend and the answering machine in her office filled three times. Sherrill said she intends to vote against the tax plan.

"What kind of 'No' do you not understand?" she said. "I've taken a running survey and it's running about 70-30 against it. The people who support it tend to be government employees."

But Sherrill said she was unnerved by one vociferous tax opponent. "I've been threatened," she said. "He said he'd picket outside my house... and I'd be taken care of."

Baker said he had a call over the weekend from someone who asked him to call in "sick" for what is arguably the most important vote of the year.

"I just said, 'No, I don't think a tax increase is necessary,'" Baker said.

And Black said he intended to postpone the vote last night, even before the bomb threat.

"There were six people not here. A couple people asked me not to run it tonight," he said.

"You don't ever know whether you have the votes till you ask

for the vote."

But when asked another time whether there are enough votes to pass the tax package, he replied: "It depends on the negotiations over the next 12 hours."

With 57 Republican members, one expelled member of the Republican caucus and as many as seven members of a breakaway Democratic group saying they would vote against the tax plan, Republicans were confident that Democrats didn't have enough support to pass the package.

"They don't have the votes," said Rep. Gregg Thompson, R-Mitchell.

"If the bill's going to be pulled, why else would it be pulled? The Republicans were going to vote as a bloc against it. Of the 57 in the caucus, there was not a vote for the tax package," Thompson said.

Black, meanwhile, said that legislative leaders intend to look at security measures in the Legislative Building. "If the building's still there tomorrow, we'll address that tomorrow," he said.

"This is the kind of thing that's prompted by people stirring up the worst of emotions in people by badmouthing government, talking about the worst in government... talking about scoundrels in government and that sort of thing," he said.

"We don't need this. There's a right way and a wrong way to debate things."

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THE Tribune

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Section B

Forget lottery, I'll settle for court cases

Okay, so let me get this straight, just so I understand it. If I keep doing something that I'm told over and over again is bad for my health, and it winds up being bad for my health, then I can file big-money lawsuits those responsible for me having bad health?

Don't get me wrong. I don't mind smokers. Some of my best friends are smokers. Some others were. It's a free society and we're all free to do just as we please. Yes, I've tried smoking. Yes, I've inhaled. Sorry, mom. You probably already knew anyway. It just didn't do anything for me. How in the world a person can be hooked on a smoking time bomb is beyond my limited comprehension, but it's not for me to understand.

The bottom line is that smoking is a choice. Those who wish to do it have decided to do it. It's not something they have to do in order to survive. They enjoy it, and I can relate. I love golf. I enjoy playing it. I make a decision to play. Sometimes, it's a decision a regret. Cigarette smokers can relate.

But here comes this utterly confusing report that long-time smokers, suffering from life-threatening effects they have been warned about for years from medical experts and even by those who provide the items for their choice of pleasure, are not only filling these ridiculous suits but also are winning them. And how. Latest reports indicate that one long-time smoker now afflicted with lung disease has been awarded a \$100 million settlement — down from a \$3 billion request — from a huge cigarette producer as awarded by a jury of, no doubt, smokers themselves.

As I ponder this totally confusing verdict, it seems that this same kind of foolish thinking can result in other outlandish court decisions, some of them related to sports. As I understand it, based on my own personal experiences, I can quit this job right now and enjoy the rest of my golf-playing life in luxury based on settlements from a number of companies that have played a role in my most miserable sporting events.

For example: During a recent round of golf, word was spread and giant signs were present all over the place regarding the spraying of the greens and fairways with hazardous chemicals designed to prevent the growth of unwanted grasses. Caution was urged from the clubhouse, at every tee, along the fairways and on the greens to keep us from cleaning our golf balls with direct mouth-to-ball contact. As I recall, however, on a number of occasions, I, as golfers often do, licked spots on the ball in order to get rid of unwanted dirt. The way I see it, the golf course and chemical supplier are both at fault. The lawsuit paperwork is being filed.

While in college, I purchased a pair of high-top tennis shoes. The salesman told me guaranteed protection from any kind of ankle injury. The shoe company also backed up that claim. The first time out, I came down after a shot on the side of a defender's foot. My right ankle banged the floor. A week out of action for recovery caused me to lose my touch. I figure there's no price tag on what I missed in the gym and in class. However, I have indicated a nice settlement figure in my pending lawsuit to Adidas.

No where did I hear that pool cue chalk will forever turn your tongue blue. But it did. I figured if it could make my stick sharp, it could do the same for my speech. Sure, it had a little bitter taste, at first. But you kind of get used to it. Still, to this day, I can't stick my tongue out for any reason in public, unless they run short of chalk at the pool hall. Then, I'm a very popular person. I hope Brunswick feels the same when I see — and show — them in court.

Sound ridiculous? I would have thought so, too. The way I see it, most jurors are at least part-time athletes, too. I figure, my cases are in the bag. When settlements are reached, you'll be among the first to know.

Devils protect status, stay perfect

By design, Mooresville varsity soccer coach Steve Stith wanted to see a few different looks Monday night.

It led to the same results. Placing some players in some different positions, the host Blue Devils kept their undefeated season intact against visiting South Rowan, gathering in goals from three different sources in a 4-2 doubling of the non-conference Raiders.

With the win, Mooresville improved to the 4-0-1 mark, managing to protect its current ninth-place ranking in the area's Sweet 16

poll in the process.

"It was a good win for us," assured Stith, back in the fold for Mooresville for a second stint as coach. "I wanted to see some players in some different spots, to give a few different looks, and they responded well. That fact that we're getting scoring from a number of sources it also is a plus."

In Monday's match, one of the season's most consistent scoring productions came through once again, as junior midfielder Phillip Citroen punched home a pair of goals to increase his team-leading

total. However, on his second goal, he suffered an ankle injury that could put his availability in jeopardy over the next two weeks.

Adding single goals apiece for the home team was senior midfielder Ryan Kenyon, and junior midfielder Matt Burton. For each, it was their first goals of the season.

The varsity win allowed Mooresville to complete a seep of both of the night's bouts. Earlier, the Little Devils junior varsity team moved to the 5-0-0 mark with a 5-1 besting of South Rowan.

The win was boosted by a pair of

goals from sophomore midfielder/striker Blair Belew, also one of the team's co-captains.

Both Mooresville teams are back on the field and at home tonight (Wednesday), facing counterparts from Forestview in the Mooresville Stadium with play beginning at 5:30 p.m.

It will be the final outing for the varsity team until engaging in next week's Hickory Invitational Tournament highlighted by an opening-round meeting slated for Tuesday against county-rival South Iredell.

A new start

Vikings pull off opening upset in 21-14 win

Maybe it was the new uniforms.

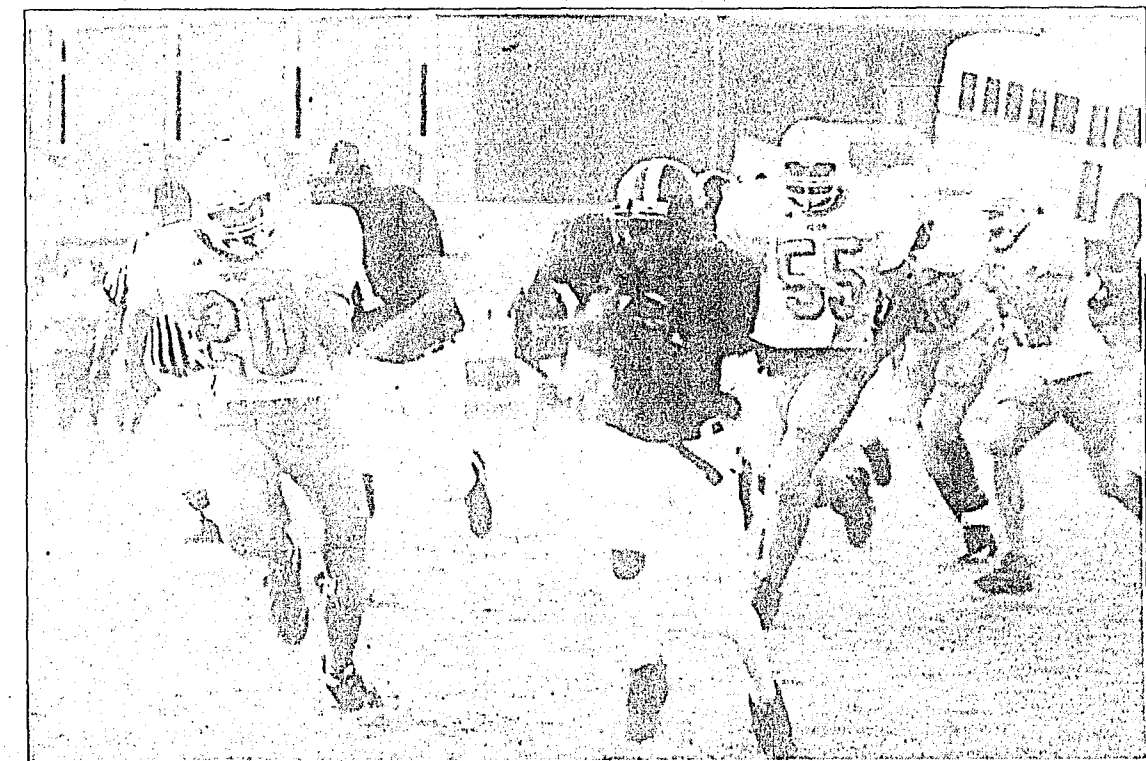
Maybe it was the new season. Combined, they may have helped spawn a new outlook for South Iredell's varsity football team following its upset, 21-14 triumph over heavily-favored and first-year foe West Rowan that saw its own celebration over reaching last year's third round of the state's 3A class playoffs cut unexpectedly short.

"I'm so proud of them," beamed a nearly hoarse Kent Millsaps, the Vikings' head coach, after anxiously counting down the game's final seconds of both teams' endowment season debut Friday night on his squad's home turf. "We pulled together and played hard for 48 minutes."

And because they did, needing less than a minute to overcome their only deficit of the game in the opening stages of the fourth quarter, the outcome may serve to spread new life on a season initially expected to be one of rebuilding.

"We were going into the season knowing we'd be young," revealed Millsaps. "We thought this season could possibly be one where we're building towards next year."

Not so fast. In a season chocked-full of newness the result of South Iredell being bumped up to the state's largest 4A class and aligned within a conference made



Breaking into the open, Martin pulls away from defenders, setting sail on first of three touchdowns

up entirely of first-time opponents, the Vikings enter this season displaying new blue-and-white trim home jerseys and white pants while also featuring new white-and-blue trim road jerseys.

Using one of the best individual performances put on display since Millsaps' arrival five seasons ago to replace legendary South Iredell icon coach Bill Mayhew, the Vikings bucked the role of underdog practically from the start, taking the lead in the first two minutes of play.

Junior tailback Tommy Martin, feeling at ease in that position after splitting time last

fall both in the backfield and at quarterback, busted through a left-side hole and danced 79 yards for a touchdown on the game's third play from scrimmage for the early damage. Kicker Marshall Hitchcock provided the point-after kick for the 7-0 lead that stood at the game's 10:59 mark.

It would ultimately stand up as the halftime difference thanks to a stiff South Iredell defense that snuffed three West Rowan drives, one of them digging as deep as the Vikings' five yard line, the rest of the half.

The Falcons, reigning champions of what was then the South Piedmont Conference, squared

matters in the first minute of play of the third period, but it took the hosts not quite four minutes to get the lead back. Martin appeared to get it back on a 52-yard punt return but the touchdown was nullified by a penalty. On the first play after that, he was the target of a quarterback Will Murdock pass down the left sideline covering 43 yards and ending in the West Rowan end zone. The PAT kick was blocked.

Protecting the TD lead, it disappeared when the Falcons logged a second score and added a successful point-after kick in the last

See NEW SEASON, page 3B

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MMS football players hone their game during a final pre-season intrasquad scrimmage.

Imps open both grid seasons Thursday

It will be two football seasons in one starting later this week for Mooresville Middle School.

The home of the Red Imps kicks off a six-week-long regular season for both its seventh-grade and eighth-grade programs with respective home and road openers against same opponents tomorrow (Thursday) afternoon.

Each will do so against fellow North Piedmont Middle School Conference opponents to begin a trek for both that will be followed throughout the season.

Both sets of Imps make their debuts against squads from Concord Middle, the youngest group receiving the right to make their first appearance at home while the older

squad does the same on the road.

Though making respective debuts against a fellow conference member, this week's openers will not have any effect on league standings for either team, as it will count as a non-conference game.

Beginning tomorrow, the teams will follow a similar schedule all season, one of them playing on their home turf while the other plays a same foe on the road that same date.

As a result, each squad will make a total of three at-home appearances apiece. In addition to Concord, other guests of the seventh-grade Imps include Northwest Cabarrus and Mt. Pleasant. In the eighth-graders' case, they will

be playing host to teams from J.N. Fries, Kannapolis and Concord again, the latter in the North Piedmont Conference Middle School game that carries league clout.

All of the MMS home games, featuring 4 p.m. starting times, will be held in the Mooresville Stadium.

Beginning with tomorrow's openers, the MMS football schedule follows:

Aug. 30Concord
Sept. 6J.N. Fries
Sept. 13Northwest Cabarrus
Sept. 20Kannapolis
Sept. 27Mt. Pleasant
Oct. 4Concord