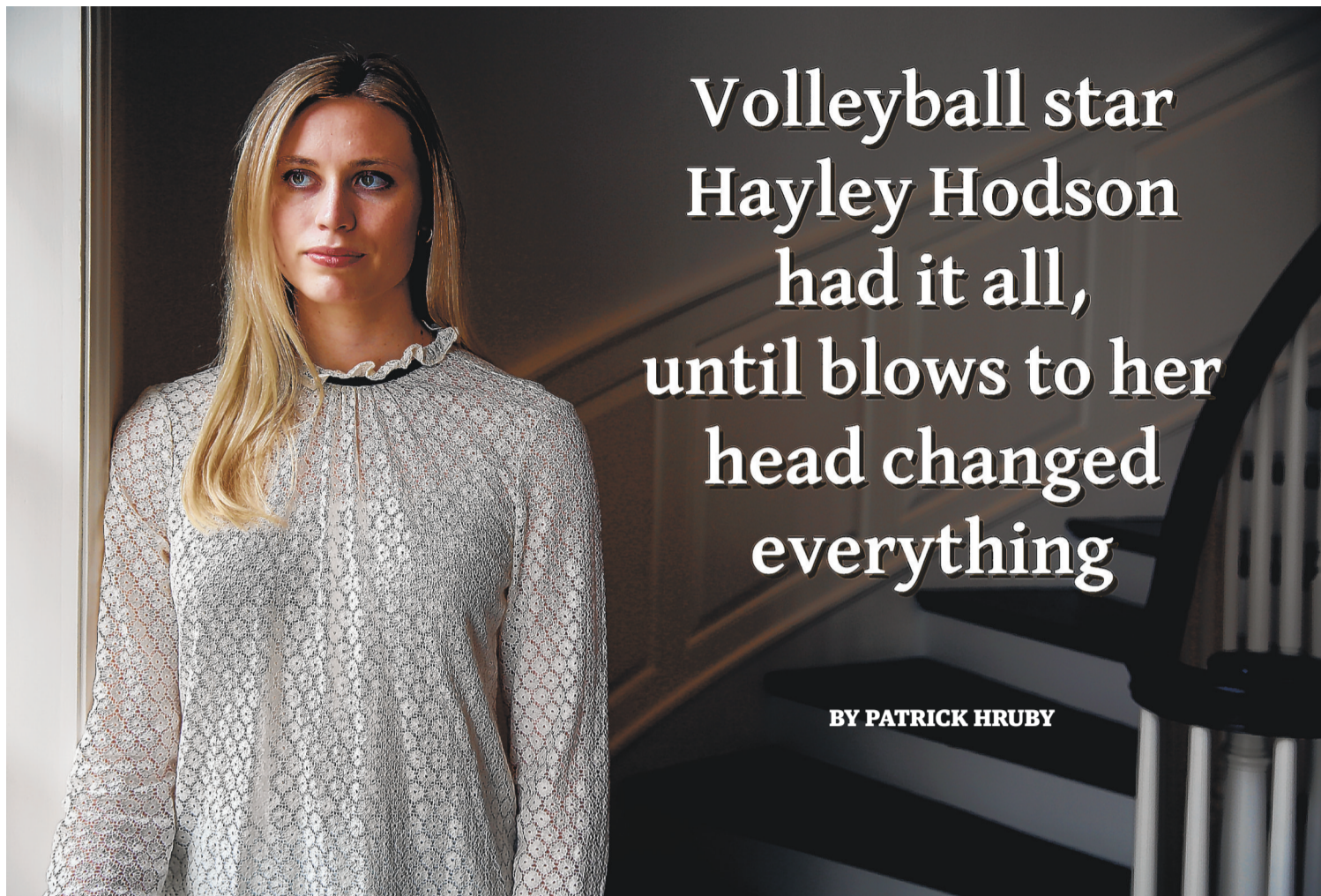


# Daily Pilot

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2020 /// Now including Coastline Pilot and Huntington Beach Independent /// dailypilot.com



## Volleyball star Hayley Hodson had it all, until blows to her head changed everything

BY PATRICK HRUBY

Something was wrong with Hayley Hodson. She had come to Stanford as the country's top volleyball recruit, an Olympic hopeful whose high school mornings in Newport Beach were self-scheduled down to the minute, the better to start classes early so she could lift weights before afternoon practice.

6:00 a.m. — Wake up. 6:03 a.m. — Brush teeth. 6:07 a.m. — Drink coffee, eat Greek yogurt. 6:13 a.m. — Get back-pack.

Now Hodson, a former Corona del Mar High School standout, could barely get out of bed. It was late September 2016, and the Cardinal were in Washington state. Hodson, a sophomore captain, was a returning All-American and National Freshman of

the Year.

She also was in pain. Her shins had been aching for months. Her swollen left foot was in a walking boot.

Those were the visible problems.

Since late 2015, Hodson had suffered migraines and insomnia, anxiety and exhaustion. A diligent student who learned calculus through online self-study, she couldn't concentrate in class. She needed reminders to eat.

Earlier in the month, Hodson had been diagnosed with clinical depression. She took medication but didn't feel better. Prior to the Washington trip, Hodson called her parents — Jimmy, an actor who is the voice of In-N-Out Burger, and Sonya, a television producer who worked for CBS Sports and on "Touched by an Angel." I

won't be playing, she said. But I need you here anyway.

Sonya made the trip with her sister-in-law, Char Hodgson. The team was staying at a hotel in Spokane. Around 4 p.m., Sonya called her daughter's room.

There's a steakhouse downstairs. Why don't you come meet us?

Mom, I can't imagine getting out of bed.

Hodson hung up. Moments later, Sonya called back.

You need to eat. I'll come get you.

Hodson's mood was dark. Her eyes watered. She kept resting her head on the restaurant table. She "talked in circles," Sonya said. "Nothing made

See **Hodson**, page A6

## County cases at almost 100,000

Healthcare agency reports another 2,091 on Saturday, bringing the total to 99,393.

BY LILLY NGUYEN

Orange County is close to 100,000 cases of COVID-19, according to data from the Orange County Health Care Agency.

The county health agency reported 2,091 cases on Saturday, pushing the total number of cases in the region to 99,393. It also reported 18 deaths, all residents not living in a facility. There have now been 1,680 deaths reported to date. Hospitalizations continue to grow, breaking records set as recently as Thursday and Friday.

Area hospitals are reporting that 1,150 cases are currently hospitalized and 273 of those cases are in intensive care units.

On Thursday, 1,025 cases were hospitalized.

On Friday, that number was 1,122.

The agency reported that about

See **COVID-19**, page A2

## OCC names new vice president of instruction

Trustees approve Michelle Grimes-Hillman to replace the outgoing Kevin Ballinger.

BY LILLY NGUYEN

Orange Coast College announced Thursday that Michelle Grimes-Hillman will be its newest vice president of instruction.

Grimes-Hillman will begin in her new role in January and will replace the interim vice president, Pamela Walker. Walker was hired in July to replace outgoing vice president of instruction Kevin Ballinger while college officials continued the search for his re-

See **OCC**, page A2



**TOP:** Hayley Hodson, the 2015 American Volleyball Coaches Assn. freshman of the year at Stanford, saw her career cut short because of post-concussion syndrome.

**LEFT:** Hodson on the cover of Volleyball Magazine in 2015.

Photos by Dania Maxwell Los Angeles Times

## Grin and bear it: A smile may reduce needle injection pain

UC Irvine has good news for the 50 million Americans who are afraid of shots.

BY BEN BRAZIL

UC Irvine has good news for the 50 million Americans who are afraid of needles.

In a recently published paper, UC Irvine researchers found that simply smiling or grimacing can significantly reduce pain from needle injections.

The researchers also found that a

smile can reduce the stress of a needle injection and lower an individual's heart rate.

"If you can put yourself in a good mood while you're stressed it really helps it go away faster," said Sarah Pressman, principal investigator and UC Irvine professor of psychological science. "If you're in a positive mood when something stressful happens, you don't perceive it as being as bad."

"... There is this natural predisposition where a lot of people smile when they're stressed. There's just like nervous smiling that sometimes happens. And we really won-

dered, why do people do this? Why do they smile during stress if it's not useful?"

For the study, which was published in the online journal *Emotion*, the researchers analyzed the responses of 231 people who were injected with a needle the size of a typical flu shot.

Participants were asked to either express a Duchenne smile, non-Duchenne smile, grimace or a neutral facial expression.

A Duchenne smile is a genuine smile that raises the corners of the

See **Needles**, page A8



**A NURSE GIVES**

a woman an injection in San Diego in February. UC Irvine researchers say they have found that simply smiling or grimacing can significantly reduce pain from needle injections.

Nelvin C. Cepeda San Diego Union-Tribune

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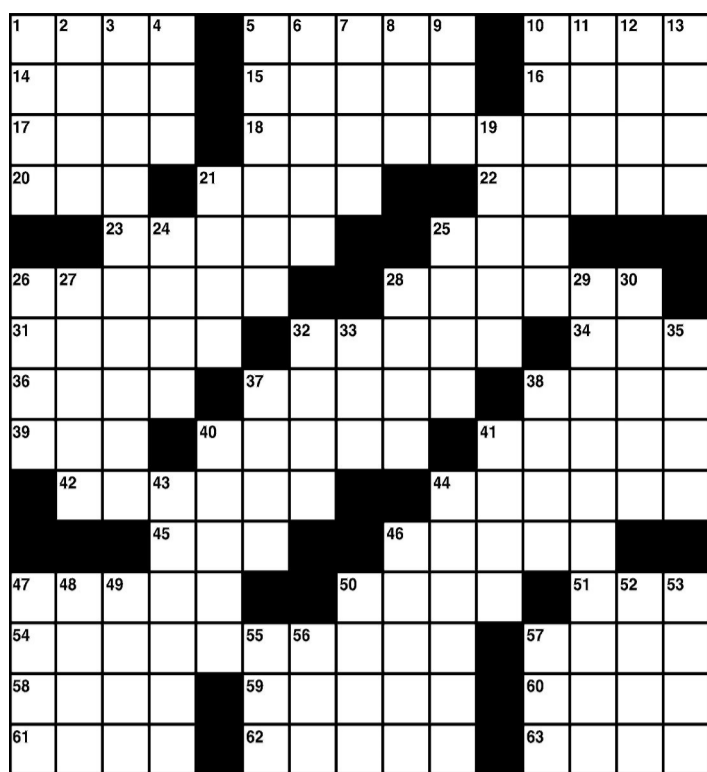
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\* Expires 1/15/21

**THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE**

By Jacqueline E. Mathews

- ACROSS**  
 1 Take out  
 5 "Jack \_ could eat no fatÉ"  
 10 Annoying insect  
 14 Toddler's taboo  
 15 Eat away at  
 16 One not to be trusted  
 17 Covetous feeling  
 18 Gnu  
 20 Emulate  
 21 Film holder  
 22 Pays a landlord  
 23 Melon or pumpkin  
 25 Ad \_ committee  
 26 Inclines downward  
 28 Most recent  
 31 Placed on the payroll  
 32 Lombardi, Shula or Landry  
 34 "El \_"; Charlton Heston film  
 36 \_ odd way; peculiarly  
 37 Man's nickname  
 38 Spanish gentlewoman  
 39 Teacher's favorite  
 40 Be generous  
 41 Fable's lesson  
 42 Card distributor  
 44 Very small  
 45 ABC followers  
 46 Jetty  
 47 Calif./Nev. border lake  
 50 Biblical book  
 51 Response to a bad pun  
 54 Gets the upper hand against  
 57 Actress Sheedy  
 58 Grow weary  
 59 Rental agreement  
 60 \_ in the face; insult  
 61 Probability  
 62 Car dings  
 63 "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. \_"  
**DOWN**  
 1 Cash register drawer section



**SUDOKU**

By The Mepham Group

Complete the grid so each row, column and 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit, 1 to 9. For strategies on how to solve Sudoku, visit [sudoku.org.uk](http://sudoku.org.uk).

9				6				3
			9	3				1
1								9 8
	4			8 2				
		3		7		4		
			6 9				5	
4 7								1
	5	2	9					
3		7						4

**For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A6.**

- |                             |                  |                    |                                |                        |                            |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2 Male Benedictine, for one | 3 Energize       | 4 Gift for a child | 5 Tailors                      | 6 Asked nosy questions | 7 Item on a bread tray     |
| 8 Tally up                  | 9 Peg for Palmer | 10 Sheep's coat    | 11 Title search company's find | 12 Wind direction      | 13 Painting, dancing, etc. |
| 19 Thin soup                | 21 Had regrets   |                    |                                |                        |                            |

- about  
 24 \_ house; realtor's event  
 25 Couldn't \_ it; was unsuccessful  
 26 Ocean vessel  
 27 Like school paper  
 28 Bridal veil material  
 29 In a disdainful way  
 30 Turner & Fey  
 32 Word attached to coal or broil  
 33 TV's "Days of \_ Lives"  
 35 Tim or Tyne  
 37 Restaurant cook  
 38 Word attached to evil or wrong  
 40 Slumber  
 41 Lunch or dinner  
 43 Worships  
 44 Graduate papers  
 46 Most terrible  
 47 Oz visitor  
 48 Very eager  
 49 Group of cattle  
 50 Tennis' Billie \_ King  
 52 Thrilled  
 53 Excessive publicity  
 55 No longer fresh  
 56 \_ Willie Winkie"  
 57 Hardwood tree

Tribune Media Services



**TWO WOMEN** walk their dogs as they stroll along a path at Upper Newport Bay in Newport Beach on Saturday.

Kevin Chang Staff Photographer

**COVID-19**

Continued from page A1

11.2% beds are available in intensive care units throughout the county. That is up from Friday's reported 10.7%. About 53% of ventilators in the region are currently available. An estimated 65,217 have recovered. The current adjusted daily case rate is 30.3. The test positivity rate — 31,605 tests were reported to county health officials on Saturday — is now 10.6% and the health equity quartile positivity rate, which tracks test positivity rates in disadvantaged communities is 16.2%. Here are the latest cumulative coronavirus case

counts and COVID-19 deaths for select cities in Orange County:  
 • Santa Ana: 19,397 cases; 340 deaths  
 • Anaheim: 16,669 cases; 358 deaths  
 • Huntington Beach: 4,112 cases; 93 deaths  
 • Costa Mesa: 3,322 cases; 47 deaths  
 • Irvine: 3,627 cases; 17 deaths  
 • Newport Beach: 1,696 cases; 26 deaths  
 • Fountain Valley: 1,203 cases; 23 deaths  
 • Laguna Beach: 383 cases; fewer than five deaths  
 Here are the case counts by age group, followed by deaths:  
 • 0 to 17: 8,661 cases; one death  
 • 18 to 24: 14,413 cases;

four deaths  
 • 25 to 34: 21,019 cases; 24 deaths  
 • 35 to 44: 15,745 cases; 42 deaths  
 • 45 to 54: 16,062 cases; 127 deaths  
 • 55 to 64: 12,025 cases; 233 deaths  
 • 65 to 74: 6,056 cases; 328 deaths  
 • 75 to 84: 3,125 cases; 370 deaths  
 • 85 and older: 2,225 cases; 551 deaths  
 Updated figures are posted daily at [ocovid19.ochealthinfo.com/coronavirus-in-oc](http://ocovid19.ochealthinfo.com/coronavirus-in-oc). For information on getting tested, visit [ocovid19.ochealthinfo.com/covid-19-testing](http://ocovid19.ochealthinfo.com/covid-19-testing).  
 lilly.nguyen@latimes.com  
 Twitter: @lilibirds

**OCC**

Continued from page A1

placement following Ballinger's retirement in June. Ballinger was with the college for more than 30 years. Grimes-Hillman was approved for appointment by Coast Community College District trustees on Wednesday. "We are thrilled to welcome Michelle Grimes-Hillman to Orange Coast College," said OCC President Angelica Suarez. "[Grimes-Hillman] brings a wealth of experience as an equity-minded instructional leader both at the local and statewide level,"

Suarez said in a statement. "Her deep roots as a former faculty member, faculty leader and instructional administrator provide her with a strong foundation to advance OCC's mission of academic excellence and student success." Campus officials said that Grimes-Hillman brings with her almost two decades of teaching and faculty leadership and more than eight years of administrative experience. She comes to the Costa Mesa campus from Long Beach City College, where she is the dean of academic services and oversees curriculum, adult education, dual enrollment, guided pathways and

enrollment management. Prior to that, she taught at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut and was a local senate president and curriculum chair. She earned her bachelor's in general psychology and master's in experimental psychology from Cal State Fullerton. "I have always appreciated Orange Coast College as the premier educational beacon in Orange County," Grimes-Hillman said in a statement. "I'm excited to continue the great work of OCC and work with faculty to promote equitable outcomes for all student groups."  
 lilly.nguyen@latimes.com  
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## forum

COLUMN | **PATRICE APODACA**

# In the midst of the pandemic, this holiday season feels different

**A**round this time every year I usually write a Christmas-themed column. In the past I've dissected holiday shopping trends, shared heartfelt stories about friends and family, and divulged items from my personal wish list.

But this holiday season is different, as it arrives at the end of what may be described as an *annus horribilis*.

(That's Latin for "horrible year," a phrase famously used by Queen Elizabeth II to describe 1992, a royal scandal-thon of a year but unquestionably less awful than 2020. Sorry for that nerdy reference but I've been binge-watching "The Crown.")

As I write, a fire is raging — again — in Orange County. Coronavirus infections and deaths are setting records almost daily. And after the most contentious election I can remember we remain bitterly divided, angry and consumed with worry about the future.

So how do I write about what promises to be, in euphemistic terms, a most unusual Christmas?

Some of the topics I've turned to in the past seem rather trivial now. I could have, for instance, returned to discussing hot Christmas decorating concepts. This year, depending on who you ask, the hippest color schemes are either navy and platinum, or bright rainbow hues. And apparently the farmhouse and cozy Christmas cottage looks are popular because they are like the comfort food of holiday home décor.

I could muse about the realization that Cyber Monday has transformed into Cyber Every Day. Or I might discuss the types of gifts that are expected to sell well this year, which my research indicates tend toward the soothing variety, as in fluffy slippers, neck massagers and bedside



**A CREW WITH** Victor's Custom Christmas Trees places a 90-foot white fir at Fashion Island on Nov. 4.

Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

devices meant to enhance sleep.

Yet in this strange, disquieting time will we even care about the baubles, bangles and bows of the holiday season?

Did we burn out on baking earlier in the pandemic and are now too gorged and jaded to contemplate making another snickerdoodle?

Can we stand to watch any more Christmas films considering that the Hallmark Channel has been airing its schmaltzy Yuletide romances since July? (Yes, I've seen a few. Don't judge.)

Will we tell young kids that Santa, keeping safety in mind, won't be shimmying down the chimney to leave gifts around the tree and will instead deposit packages UPS-style, outside the

front door?

Will we approach our gift-giving with less enthusiasm than in years past, figuring why bother when the whole bloody world is a disaster?

Or will it be the opposite? Will we find ourselves clinging more tightly than ever to whatever traditions we can muster in a socially distanced, mask-wearing, we're-all-germ-factories context?

It's evident that at least some people are trying desperately to maintain a sense of normalcy — like the folks currently working to organize an unofficial version of this year's canceled Newport Beach Christmas Boat Parade.

Despite such efforts, the one consistent and overriding theme I've been able to identify for this

holiday season can be summed up in one word: small.

I'm referring, of course, to the tiny turkeys, more diminutive Christmas trees, strict limits on social gatherings and scaled-down expectations regarding who we see and what we do. When it comes to many of our holiday customs, we will be doing small in a big way.

Yet in some very important respects, this Christmas season should be even larger than usual.

I'm thinking of the extra thanks that should be showered upon the heroic frontline workers who have toiled mightily for the common good during the pandemic, often at great risk to themselves — the doctors, nurses, first-responders, scientists, teachers,

food providers and many others who are richly deserving of our deep gratitude and support.

While we're at it, we could also heap thanks upon the delivery people who rush packages to our doorsteps, the postal workers who keep our mailboxes filled and the clerks, cleaning crews, child-care providers and other essential workers who have kept our society from collapsing while the rest of us hunker down at home.

On a personal note, I'd like to give a shout-out to the terrific employees at all the markets I frequent in Newport Beach and Costa Mesa, who time and again have cheerfully gathered my online-ordered groceries and loaded them into the back of my car with the greatest of care.

While we're thinking big, we shouldn't overlook a monumental dose of compassion due to all of those who have suffered this year, and an acknowledgment of what they have lost: Jobs. Businesses. Classrooms. Good health. Physical touch. And for some, the loved ones who didn't make it to this holiday season.

What it comes down to is that when the world around us feels shrunken and cold, and we're repeatedly told that a dangerous winter lies ahead — well, that's when we must strive harder than ever to make our hearts grow.

The spirit and resilience we summon when times are tough can lead us out of the darkness and into a future in which, hopefully not too long from now, we may look back in gratitude at the end of an *annus mirabilis*. That's Latin for "wonderful year."

**PATRICE APODACA** is a former Los Angeles Times staff writer and is coauthor of "A Boy Named Courage: A Surgeon's Memoir of Apartheid." She lives in Newport Beach.

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# HODSON

Continued from page A1

sense.” Under the table, Char grabbed Sonya’s hand. Sonya was afraid. She knew something was very wrong. Only later would she learn Hodson already had played her last match. Within 10 months, her daughter retired from the sport with a diagnosis of post-concussion syndrome, the result of what the fam-

ily would claim were brain injuries suffered after being hit in the head with volleyballs near the end of her freshman season. Hodson filed a lawsuit in 2018 against Stanford and the National Collegiate Athletic Assn. for failing to provide proper medical care for those injuries, allegations the school and the NCAA deny.

**‘A DREAM ATHLETE’**  
Ever since her family attended the 2002 Salt Lake

City Games when she was 5, Hodson wanted to be an Olympian. Her youth softball team won a national championship when she was 8; the next year, she quit after the sport was dropped from the Summer Games. “I was a go-for-the-gold-type person,” she said. Hodson turned to volleyball. At first, she hated it. The net was too high. The ball jammed her fingers. But Hodson was tall, standing 6 feet tall in eighth grade. She also was determined. At 12, Hodson attended a tryout in San Jose for USA Volleyball’s high-performance youth program and caught the eye of then-program director Denise Sheldon.

“Hayley was at the top of my depth chart” from that moment forward, says Sheldon, who in 2016 managed the women’s national team at the Rio Games. “What stood out to me with her, year after year, is that she would do whatever it takes to make our [youth] national teams.” As a freshman, Hodson led Corona del Mar High in scoring as the school reached the 2011 CIF Southern Section Division IA finals; as a junior, she took a leave of absence from school to play for the gold medal-winning U.S. squad in the U23 world championships in Mexico, finishing as the team’s third-leading scorer.

At the invitation of women’s national team coach Karch Kiraly, Hodson became just the third high school player to train with America’s senior squad, spending two months competing against professional players she mostly had seen on television. “Hayley absolutely had the potential to play on the Olympic team,” said Holly McPeak, a three-time Olympian and Hodson’s high school beach volleyball coach. “She had all the skills. She was coachable and hard-working. In my eyes, she was a dream athlete.”

In April 2015, Volleyball Magazine featured Hodson on its cover as the nation’s No. 1 college volleyball recruit. And Hodson had a plan: Graduate college in less than four years. Train with Team USA. Play in the 2020 Tokyo Games. Play pro volleyball overseas. Return for law school, springboarding from sports into



Los Angeles Times

**HAYLEY HODSON**, right, and Tia Scambray show off silver medals they won with the USA Girls’ Youth National Team at the FIVB U18 World Championships in Thailand in August 2013.

broadcasting or legal work. “Hayley never seemed to go through the chaos teenagers go through,” Sheldon said. “If you gave her a responsibility, there was absolutely no question she would make sure it got taken care of. She was the epitome of a kid with persistence and mental strength.”

When Hodson arrived at Stanford in August 2015, Jimmy Hodson said, then-Cardinal coach John Dunning told him that she was the most well-prepared freshman he had ever seen. She earned All-Pac-12 honors, leading the team in kills, points and service aces.

Hodson’s days were demanding: four hours of morning classes. Get to Maples Pavilion by 2 p.m. to get taped and warm up for practice. Practice from 4 to 8 p.m. Lift weights until 9. Homework and film study until after midnight.

Yet, Sonya said, “all I got every day from Hayley was, ‘Mom, this place is great. I’m at home here. I love it.’”

**TWO HITS**

Two hits, the family said, changed everything. The first happened Nov. 9, 2015. During a Stanford practice, Hodson said, Dunning had her and teammate Madi Bugg perform the “courage” drill. In a 2012 YouTube video, Dunning demonstrates the drill, which he said improves “reaction time and focus.” Players stand 10 feet from the net; on the other side, a coach atop a stool slaps sharply angled, medium-speed shots toward the players, who dig the ball with their arms while

keeping their heads out of harm’s way.

“You need to be careful with this,” Dunning says in the video. “We call it the ‘courage’ drill appropriately. If I were you and going to do this — well, I don’t know if I would do it at all.”

Hodson’s lawsuit says the drill was “dangerous,” and she said her teammates hit full-speed shots.

A ball struck Hodson on the right side of her head. Her Stanford athletic medical records describe what happened next: A team trainer had her take a sideline neurocognitive test used to evaluate injured athletes for concussions. Hodson had trouble seeing out of her right eye. There was worry she had suffered a detached retina.

A teammate drove Hodson to the campus hospital, where she was diagnosed with a “likely closed head injury/maybe minor concussion.” The next day, the medical records show, a Stanford team doctor diagnosed a “mild concussion.”

According to a 2015 study published in the American Journal of Sports Medicine, women’s volleyball has the ninth-highest concussion rate among 25 NCAA sports. Most athletes who suffer a single concussion — with rest and a gradual return to activity — experience no lasting ill effects.

However, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and a number of medical studies, athletes who suffer a second concussion while recovering from a previous one face a greater risk of prolonged or permanent symptoms, including chronic headaches, mood

and behavioral changes, and cognitive impairment.

Suffering multiple concussions also has been linked to increased risk later in life of depression and cognitive impairment, while exposure to repetitive brain trauma — including sub-concussive hits to the head that don’t cause obvious symptoms — is associated with the development of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a neurodegenerative disease found in the brains of several high-profile athletes following their deaths.

In high school, Hodson said, she was diagnosed with her first concussion following volleyball hits to the head. Afterward, she suffered from insomnia and distorted vision, an account confirmed by Team USA doctor Chris Koutures, who treated her. She didn’t play for more than a month; when she experienced vertigo and a tingling sensation in her first practice back, she was sidelined again until her symptoms subsided.

Ideally, Koutures said, athletes should not return to play until they are symptom-free. But in the middle of a season, he said, all of that can be challenging. “There’s pressure for athletes to get back,” Koutures said. “It can be self-imposed, I don’t want to miss the big game, so I will tell people what they want to hear.” Or it can be pressure from the team or coach.

Hodson was concussed on a Monday night. On Tuesday, Stanford’s medical records indicate she told a team doctor that she was

See Hodson, page A7

# Daily Pilot

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**Joan Penberthy LaMontagne**

May 5, 1923 - November 18, 2020

Joan Penberthy LaMontagne passed peacefully of natural causes at age 97 in Corona Del Mar, California with her family at her side. She was born in Glendale, California where she grew up and spent her summers on Balboa Island. She graduated from Stanford University in 1945 (biology and pre-Med) Phi Beta Kappa & Alpha Phi. Although she was accepted into Stanford Medical School, she chose to marry Lt. Cmdr. John deGottreau LaMontagne February 17, 1946 and they went on to have four children, John, Stephen, Anne & David. Many years later, Joan returned to graduate school and earned her PhD in Psychotherapy becoming a much loved Psychotherapist. In addition to her therapy, her passion was understanding the path to Enlightenment and imparting this to others through giving classes and writing articles. She grew up sailing in the Balboa Island Yacht Club (BIYC) and eventually sailed with her husband and family to Hawaii as well as through the Panama Canal and throughout the Caribbean Sea on their own SV Queen Anne. She loved music, played the piano throughout her long life, and has passed this passion on to her children and grandchildren. She was predeceased by her husband John and son Stephen. She is survived by her three children John, Anne and David, seven grandchildren Tony, Michael, Daniel and Mimi, Lauren, Grace and Luc and three great grandchildren Gavin, Ashley and Dagny. We will miss our loving mother and wish her eternal peace on her spiritual journey.

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# HODSON

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suffering from headaches and “feeling in a fog.”

She was held out of a road match against Washington on Thursday. Stanford’s records show she continued to have distorted vision in her right eye Friday, yet was cleared by a team doctor over the phone Saturday to participate in a full practice and play in Stanford’s road victory over Washington State on Sunday.

The same team doctor examined Hodson on Monday and recorded her condition as “concussion, resolved.” Over the next two weeks, she played in four Stanford victories, twice leading the team in kills.

On Nov. 26, she visited her parents for Thanksgiving. The Cardinal were playing UCLA the next day. At dinner, Hodson was edgy and irritable, her family said, telling them volleyball was an “off-limits topic.”

“She very much wasn’t herself, but we never even thought about the concussion,” Sonya said. “Once a kid gets cleared, nobody ever mentions it again.”

In the UCLA match, Hodson tried to block a hard shot. The ball ricocheted off her forehead and into the stands.

The Cardinal won in five sets. To this day, Hodson barely remembers the rest of the match. In her lawsuit, she claims she suffered a undiagnosed concussion during that match — and that Stanford did not evaluate her for a second brain injury.

Medical records reviewed by The Times do not indicate that Hodson was evaluated for a concussion during or following the UCLA match. A Stanford athletic department spokesperson declined to answer questions and said the school does not comment on pending litigation.

“Athletically,” Hodson said, “that was the last time I played well.”



**HAYLEY HODSON** stands in her parents’ Newport Beach home while wearing her U.S. Women’s National Team jacket.

Dania Maxwell | Los Angeles Times

## ‘LIKE CLIMBING MOUNT EVEREST’

Following Stanford’s season-ending NCAA tournament loss to Loyola Marymount that Dec. 4, Hodson spiraled downward.

She couldn’t sleep. Her appetite vanished. Suddenly afraid to be alone, she called friends at all hours. She struggled to study for final exams.

“Nothing was going into my brain,” she said. “Anything new, I couldn’t learn it.”

When her family took a holiday ski vacation, she mostly stayed inside, avoiding people and scribbling negative thoughts in a journal.

Hodson’s insomnia worsened when she returned to campus. So did the shin pain she had been experiencing since late in her freshman season. She had frequent migraines. She used to love exercise and hated sugary foods; now, she was perpetually exhausted and craved sweets. Hodson struggled

through Stanford’s spring season of beach volleyball. In March, she experienced vertigo on her way to the student union and nearly collapsed — something she said had happened following a concussion in high school.

On another day, Hodson said, she broke down sobbing in a training room. She says that Dunning called her into his office.

“I told him, ‘John, my mom is coming on a plane right now because I have been crying for the last eight hours. I don’t know what is going on, but I am not OK.’”

Dunning did not respond to a request for comment.

To treat Hodson’s shins, records confirm, Stanford trainers gave her acupuncture and performed instrument-assisted soft tissue mobilization, a painful process in which a metal tool was repeatedly pressed into her shins; to treat her lethargy, a sports dietitian recommended eating more carbohydrates. Before her sophomore

season began, Hodson was named a co-captain.

“They were really counting on me to lead,” Hodson said, adding that she felt pressured. “I knew all the freshmen girls coming in, and I loved them so much. I wanted it to be a redemptive season after losing in the NCAA tournament.”

In early September 2016, Hodson’s parents visited Palo Alto. Jimmy had printed out a checklist of depression symptoms. In their daughter’s room, Sonya says, “I was checking them off, one after the other.” A Stanford psychiatrist, unaffiliated with the athletic department, diagnosed Hodson with clinical depression and prescribed Prozac.

During a match against Purdue, Hodson experienced dizziness, blurry vision and tingling in her fingers, all of which she said, “happened to me during my concussion [in high school].” During her next match, against Cal Poly San Luis Obispo on Sept. 11, she felt a stabbing

pain in her left foot, which swelled up and left her sidelined.

“That was a blessing,” she said. “[The coaches] couldn’t put me on the court.”

Sonya said that she asked coaches to redshirt Hayley during the Washington state trip. “They told me injuries are a part of the game and that I would just have to trust them,” Sonya said.

When the Cardinal returned to Stanford, Hodson said, “I was so depressed, I was walking across streets hoping I would get hit by a bus and die. Not actively suicidal. But I didn’t really care about life at that point. Or being on a court.”

Two days later, Oct. 4, Hodson took a medical leave of absence.

## ‘WORKING AT 10%’

That December, Stanford defeated Texas to win the 2016 national championship. Hodson didn’t watch. Instead, she was meeting with a psychologist in Manhattan Beach.

Hodson still wanted to play. She read every self-help book she could, and met almost daily with doctors and physical therapists. She considered transferring.

The family did not trust Stanford. School doctors, Hodson says, had diagnosed her foot pain as inflammation and told her that she wasn’t risking further injury by playing. Medical records show that an independent doctor subsequently reviewed MRI scans taken by Stanford and determined she had a stress fracture.

On the day of title match, Hodson said, her mobile phone lit up. “It was all sort of people I knew from volleyball,” she says, “saying things like, ‘Congratulations, this is your title, too.’” None of the messages, she said, came from Stanford.

Dunning retired in January 2017. His replacement, Kevin Hambly, visited the Hodsons at their Newport Beach home. “He said, ‘I can’t help you with what happened in the past, but I can help going forward,’” Sonya said. “‘If it takes to your senior year, I will help you love volleyball again.’”

Hodson was hopeful. By early March, her foot had healed. Her shins were pain-free. She planned to return to Stanford in April. But she was still struggling emotionally, and dealing with insomnia and listlessness.

While researching NCAA transfer and medical rules, Sonya had connected with Ramogi Huma, a former UCLA linebacker and executive director of the National College Players Assn., a nonprofit advocacy organization. Sonya mentioned that her daughter’s decline had started after she was concussed.

Go back in time, Huma advised. Start there.

Sonya and Haley reached out to experts, starting with David Baron, a USC professor and neuropsychiatry researcher who has worked with many athletes. Baron

See **Hodson**, page A8

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## HODSON

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said it was likely Hodson was suffering from post-concussion syndrome (PCS), a disorder in which symptoms such as dizziness, light sensitivity and intense headaches persist long after someone experiences an initial brain injury.

"Oftentimes, the symptoms look like depression or anxiety, and sometimes they are misdiagnosed," said Baron, now the senior vice president and provost of the Western University of Health Sciences "But we see changes in moods, sleep, irritability. Those can be related to, and directly caused by, the effects of impacts to the brain."

A lengthy evaluation by David Franklin, a clinical neuropsychologist at UC Riverside, confirmed Baron's suspicions. Parts of her brain, Hodson said, "were working at 10%."

Franklin said her impaired concentration and reaction time made it dangerous for her to continue playing volleyball, Hodson said. (Stanford doctors unaffiliated with the school's athletic department subsequently came to the same conclusion.)

Koutures, the Team USA doctor who had treated Hodson in high school, recommended she medi-

cally retire.

Hodson returned to Stanford in April 2017. She announced her medical retirement in June. In between, she worked as a production assistant for the Pac-12 Network on a beach volleyball match. By the end of the broadcast, she was shaking uncontrollably.

"I realized that volleyball was over for me," Hodson said. "And that's not what I would have chosen."

### SPEAKING OUT

Brain injuries are intensely isolating. A torn knee ligament can cut athletes off from their sport — but post-concussion syndrome can alienate someone from their entire life.

"You're not you in a lot of ways," Hodson said. "There's invisible and silent suffering, days you are stuck in the dark. Looking other people in the eye can be difficult. Nobody knows how to deal with it. You lose friends. It's just so lonely."

To cope, Hodson shared her story.

On her blog, she wrote about trusting Stanford and feeling pressured to play through injuries. About

spending a week at a brain injury clinic in Utah. About the loss of her Olympic dreams and a volleyball community that, she said, "felt like family." Stories started coming in return.

Hodson heard from Haylee Williams (née Roberts), a Bakersfield native she played against in club

outlier, or is this systemic? It seems systemic."

Hodson connected with Huma, the campus athlete advocate. She read articles and watched documentaries about abusive coaches and economic exploitation of young athletes.

She learned that the

NCAA to place brain injury warning labels on volleyballs; train college coaches and trainers to recognize and properly treat brain injuries; and monitor and discipline those who fail to do so.

Contacted by The Times, a spokesperson for the NCAA declined to comment or answer questions about Hodson.

Now 24, Hodson still suffers from migraines and insomnia. She takes medication for depression and chronic fatigue, and sees a therapist for post-traumatic stress disorder.

She needs extra time and a special note-taking app to complete her schoolwork and exams, and lives by herself so that she can "come home to what is essentially a sensory deprivation room." Hodson said that she has improved from "four hours of brain function a day to eight" but can end up exhausted and overwhelmed by daily life.

"There are days where I am haunted," Hodson said. "I was a really capable person before [my injuries]. Will I be 40 with dementia? If I hit a life crisis, will I spin out?"

It would be easier, she

said, not to litigate her brain injury — and easier still not to publicly discuss her trauma.

"About every other day," she said, "I'm like, 'Why have I done this?'"

Hodson knows the answer: to advocate for other young athletes. She graduated from Stanford in June 2019, and in December finished her first semester of law school at UCLA.

Hodson recently connected with a volleyball player at a Division I school who suffered two concussions and subsequently struggled with her mental health.

"When I was younger, I totally looked up to Hayley," said the player, who asked not to be identified to protect her privacy. "She was the *it* volleyball player. Hearing her story was like, 'I am not crazy.' It was validation for what I was feeling and going through."

Rather than play hurt, the player took a medical leave. She's now at home, recovering.

"We have kids all over the country that need to save themselves and don't know how," Hodson said. "If I speak out, then maybe someone else with something wrong will have the courage to speak out, too."

**PATRICK HRUBY** is a freelance reporter based in Washington, D.C.

## NEEDLES

Continued from page A1

mouth and produces crow's feet around the eyes.

The individuals who expressed the Duchenne smile and grimace reported that the injection hurt only about half as much as the participants in the neutral expression group. The Duchenne smile group also showed lower heart rates. Pressman said they don't yet fully understand why the facial expressions help dampen pain and stress. The theory behind it is called the facial feedback hypothesis.

"Which is just the idea of like fake it 'til you make it," Pressman said. "So, this idea that if you pretend like you're feeling a certain emotion, then it should translate

into feeling that to some extent. It should alter your emotion."

Pressman said the idea has been around since Charles Darwin proposed it in the 1800s. Psychologists have been researching it for the past few decades.

"The thought is that the nerves in your face, that when those muscles are activating they actually send a message to your brain that's telling you that you're happy," Pressman said. "... The basic premise is that somehow that expression is sending signals back to your mind, and it's altering your emotion in some sense."

Pressman said researchers have long thought that the evolutionary purpose of smiling is, at least partially, to signal to other people that you are not a threat.

So smiling has an anti-stress ef-

fect because it is meant to encourage us to be social.

Pressman said it's also possible that if facial nerves are sending messages to the brain, then they could also send messages to the body. In particular, it could be signaling a nerve which is responsible for parasympathetic function in the body. Pressman said it could be telling this "rest and digest" nerve to calm down.

"It could be that those nerves, when you smile, are actually directly triggering that sort of relaxation nerve in the body and that's why it's reducing stress, that's why it's making things not hurt as much," Pressman said.

Pressman said the explanation for why grimacing may reduce pain is more complex because researchers have not really been

studying the expression.

The UC Irvine researchers included it in the study because it's the face people naturally make in response to pain.

Pressman said the grimace is interesting because it actually resembles a smile. In the study, the expression worked similarly as a smile in lessening pain.

"The really interesting thing that we found was that, while they both made you feel psychologically better, and grimacing was even helpful in reducing your perceived stress, only the smiling was associated with a physical effect," Pressman said. "So, when we have a stress response, you know, our heart rate goes up. And so we were monitoring that, and it was really interesting because the grimacing group, even though they felt better,

they looked identical to our control group when you look at their physiology."

Pressman said smiling helps with other kinds of pain and stress as well, though it's likely more helpful in situations where the pain is short-lasting.

Previous research showed that it helped with cold-related pain and stress, like from putting your hand in a bucket of ice.

"Since we know it helps with cold pain and with needle pain, there's no reason to think that it wouldn't help with other kinds of pain," Pressman said, pointing out that it likely won't help with more extreme or chronic types of pain, like cutting off a finger.

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