

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



Photos by Dania Maxwell | Los Angeles Times

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

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 backpack

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 sense."

Under the table, Char grabbed Sonya's hand. Sonya was afraid. She knew some-

thing 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 family 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 says.

Hodson turned to volleyball. At first, she

See **Hodson**, page R4



Courtesy of Kim Konte

THE ALL AMERICAN Asphalt factory in Irvine is being investigated by the city.

Probe focuses on Irvine factory's emissions

After facing pressure from hundreds of residents, city taps contractor to look into All American Asphalt and its potentially toxic fumes.

BY BEN BRAZIL

After facing pressure from north Irvine residents and a group of UC Irvine advisors, the city of Irvine has hired a contractor to investigate an asphalt factory for potentially spewing out toxic fumes.

For months, residents have been contacting the city and regional air regulators to force All American Asphalt to cease production and relocate. They say they have felt like their voices are falling on deaf ears.

The community group, Non-Toxic Neighborhoods, has been leading the effort through organizing residents, stationing lawn signs throughout the city and partnering with UC Irvine pro-

"Every day there's exposure, I go for a walk and it stings your eyes."

— **Kim Konte**

Founder of Non-Toxic Neighborhoods

fessors. More than 2,100 people have signed an online petition.

Parents like Kim Konte, founder of Non-Toxic Neighborhoods, worry for their children's health.

"Every day there's exposure, I go for a walk and it stings your eyes," said Konte, who lives near the asphalt plant. "We don't know what the long-term impacts are going to be on our kids."

In response to residents, the city has hired Irvine-based Ninyo and Moore Geotechnical and Environmental Sciences Consultants to take air samples and review the emissions of the asphalt factory.

Melissa Haley, Irvine deputy city manager and spokesperson, said she could not say when the contractor's air sampling and review will be completed.

The city has been unwilling to discuss specifics about the contractor and the testing of the asphalt factory due to ongoing litigation.

Updated information about the plant is available on the city's website.

City Hall sued the asphalt plant in late July, claiming it's in violation of air quality regulations and local public nuisance provisions.

The lawsuit contends that the plant discharges air contaminants stemming from asphalt, oil, tar-like substances,

See **Factory**, page R2



HODSON, CALLED the nation's No. 1 recruit, is shown on the cover of Volleyball Magazine in April 2015.

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SANTA ANA DISCUSSES THE FORMATION OF CIVILIAN POLICE OVERSIGHT COMMISSION

BY BEN BRAZIL

Under the leadership of a new mayor and three new council members, the Santa Ana City Council this week discussed the formation of a civilian police oversight commission.

City staff had spent the last few months compiling information on other civilian police oversight programs and presented it to the council at the Tuesday meeting.

Most council members conveyed favor for the commission, which Mayor Pro Tem David Penaloza said is “long overdue.”

The details of the commission will be hammered out in the ensuing months.

Community input will possibly help decide what form the oversight commis-

sion takes. A city survey showed that a combined 72.5% of respondents strongly agree or agree that police oversight is needed in Santa Ana.

Respondents listed top priorities for the proposed commission to be transparency, community outreach, use of statistical pattern analysis, open communication with the police department, independence, access to public records, increased resources, increased protection for peace officer rights and support for government and elected officials.

The consideration of the commission comes amid a nationwide reckoning with police brutality since the killing of George Floyd earlier this year.

“I think that this over-

sight commission is going to give us the ability to look closely at the root causes of mass incarceration, police misconduct,” said new Councilman Johnathan Hernandez. “And I think when we do that, we can really cultivate some solutions that help us with those that are directly impacted by crime and violence and everything else that comes with living in urban communities like this.”

At the meeting, council members were presented with three different models of civilian police oversight commissions: investigation-focused, review-focused and auditor/monitor models.

According to the presentation, the investigation-focused model relies on inde-

pendent investigations of complaints against officers, while review-focused models center around commentary on completed investigations and making recommendations to police executives.

The auditor/monitor model aims to instill change by making recommendations to police departments after reviews of police policies, practices or training.

This model examines how the department deals with complaints investigations, including the quality of the investigations, findings and whatever discipline was given.

The presentation included an overview of various existing programs in cities throughout the state, including Riverside and An-

heim.

Anaheim’s Police Review Board is comprised of seven residents. The city also contracts with the Office of Investigative Review Group, which is given access to confidential files to provide investigations and reports on the police department.

Most council members were supportive of either an investigation-focused commission, an auditor/monitor model or a hybrid of the two.

Mayor Vicente Sarmiento said he specifically favored the Riverside model, which has investigatory powers.

“I do think there’s a lot of value in a commission ... whether it’s investigatory and, or, auditor/monitor,” Sarmiento said. “I think that’s where I would be leaning towards. I like the

Riverside model from what I see just at first glance, because it seems like it’s a blend.”

Newly elected Councilwoman Jessie Lopez proposed a model similar to Oakland’s, which has the power to fire and hire a new chief.

Hernandez said that he would like to have people on the commission who have been through the justice system.

“As this country is facing and as we’ve seen some very adverse police misconduct all throughout the country, I think it’s necessary to have an ideological shift in the inclusivity of the criminal justice system,” Hernandez said.

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Allen J. Schaben | Los Angeles Times

CLOSED IN SEPTEMBER. Costa Mesa’s Fairview Developmental Center reopened this week as an alternate care facility capable of admitting nearly 200 low-acuity COVID-19 patients, with the ability to expand.

With virus at a critical peak, the Fairview Developmental Center in Costa Mesa reopens to admit COVID-19 patients

BY SARA CARDINE

As an unparalleled surge in coronavirus infections outstrips hospital capacities, and with virtually no ICU beds available for Orange County COVID-19 patients, officials announced Wednesday Costa Mesa’s Fairview Developmental Center has reopened as a regional alternate care site.

Partially retrofitted in April to accept individuals recovering from COVID-19 and other low-acuity coronavirus cases, the center stopped admitting patients on Sept. 30 after several months of low patient census.

The state-owned facility remained in a “warm close” state, meaning it could reopen within 72 to 96 hours if needed.

But this week, as state and county health officials looked for ways to alleviate packed hospital emergency rooms and ICU units, the site was officially brought back online this week.

The first round of COVID-19 patients has been admitted into an area with a 125-bed capacity, according to Costa Mesa Fire &

Rescue Chief Dan Stefano, who acts as a liaison representing the city in matters related to Fairview.

“We’d been hearing for the past month the state’s alternate care sites were going to ramp up, and in the past week and a half [the site] has been coming back online,” Stefano said Wednesday, estimating a patient census of about 10 by this weekend.

Meanwhile, another two units are each being prepared to admit anywhere from 25 to 50 memory care patients and individuals with developmental disabilities.

Costa Mesa Mayor Katrina Foley said Fairview would play an important role in serving the needs of the most vulnerable.

“It’s critical that we care for these residents in a way that’s safe and gets them out of housing situations where they may not be able to socially distance from everyone and allow them to recover with dignity,” Foley said.

Orange County Health Care officials recorded Wednesday

3,231 new infections and 23 deaths. Area hospitals reported treating 1,486 COVID-19 patients with 319 in intensive care units.

As critical as the shortage of hospital beds is, Stefano said staffing levels are presenting an added challenge to firefighters and paramedics who regularly transport patients to facilities throughout the county.

Recent average patient off-load times, aka “wall times” — the time from an ambulance’s arrival to the time a patient is seen, so named because paramedics and patients on gurneys are often lined up along a receiving wall — have gone from about 15 to 20 minutes to upward of one hour, Stefano said.

The picture is worse in neighboring Los Angeles, Imperial and San Bernardino counties, he added, where medical responders have had to wait up to six or seven hours for a single patient to be admitted.

Given the current hospital shortages, officials are urging residents to seek treatment

from their personal physicians or area urgent care facilities unless they are experiencing an absolute medical emergency.

“If you need us, we’re there,” Stefano said. “[But] if you come in and you’re not in an immediate emergency, you’re going to have to wait. You don’t want to be a part of that.”

The fire chief said what happens in the next 17 days could determine the course of the pandemic for the first six months of the new year, adding now is the “most critical time we have seen to date.”

Fairview is one of several alternate care sites being opened across California. Others are coming online to address hospital bed shortages in Fresno, Imperial and Sacramento counties.

While the census is still small, officials say the capacity can be increased if the appropriate staff can be found.

“You’ve got to have the people,” Stefano said.

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AP

NOEL JESSE PLATA was sentenced to death for the 1995 torture slaying of an Orange County teenager. Plata, 45, was found dead in his cell Monday.

California man sentenced to death for 1995 killing of O.C. teen dies in cell

SACRAMENTO — A California man sentenced to death for the 1995 torture slaying of an Orange County teenager died early Monday of unknown causes, prison officials said.

Noel Jesse Plata, 45, was found unresponsive in his cell at San Quentin State Prison before 4 a.m. and pronounced dead about half an hour later despite an employee’s attempt at life-saving measures and outside medical assistance, they said.

No foul play is suspected, but officials said his death was being investigated. The cause of death will be decided by a coroner.

He and an accomplice, Ronald Tri Tran, were sentenced to death for the first-degree murder of Linda Park, 18. The two gang members tortured her into revealing where her family kept its valuables, then strangled her.

Plata was already in prison serving a sentence of life with the possibility of parole for another first-degree murder when he was convicted in Park’s slaying.

There are currently 710 people on California’s death row, the nation’s largest, though Gov. Gavin Newsom has imposed a moratorium on executions so long as he is governor.

— Associated Press

FACTORY

Continued from page R1

rubber and smoke. A hearing is set for Jan. 25.

All American Asphalt declined to comment for this article.

After trying to get help from the city for so long, residents are skeptical that the contractor’s analysis will be as in depth as it needs to be.

UC Irvine professor Dean Baker, who is working with the residents and Non-Toxic Neighborhoods, shares in that skepticism. Baker has met with the consultants and reviewed its scope of work.

“The couple of questions are — are they really going to measure everything using the sort of I’ll say state-of-the-art, best methods rather than just sort of the garden-variety, EPA, regulatory methods?” Baker said in an interview. “And secondly, once they get the data, are they going to interpret it correctly in a way that is most protective of the health of the residents?”

Baker is the chief of the division of Occupational and Environmental Medicine and director of the

Center for Occupational and Environmental Health at UC Irvine.

On Wednesday, he emailed a letter to newly elected Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan, urging the City Council to establish an independent scientific oversight panel to provide advice and technical recommendations to the city and contractor.

“It is essential that the exposure assessment be robust and comprehensive in order to fully characterize potential health risks,” the letter says. “It is also important that the process of conducting the exposure assessments, interpreting the findings, and developing a health risk assessment be open and transparent, so the impacted residents can be confident that the City and its agents are acting in their best interests.”

He continues: “Based on our review of the scope of work and these initial findings, we believe the air monitoring exposure assessment plan proposed by the City contractors is not sufficiently robust to fully measure the toxic chemical exposures or characterize potential health risks to nearby residents.”

Khan said Monday that a moratorium of the facility that has been proposed by residents cannot move forward “without any data supporting it.” Khan has stated she will focus on environmental issues during her mayoral term.

“The residents definitely wanted a moratorium, and I explained to them that the process of a moratorium requires that we have some factual data to support it,” Khan said in an interview with TimesOC a few weeks ago.

“And one of the things that I pushed for was to make sure that we had data available. And so right now we do have a consulting team that is out there that is going to be collecting data on air sampling and making sure that we know exactly what’s in the air, and how our residents are being affected because then we can take the next appropriate steps.”

Baker said over the phone that UC Irvine professors Jun Wu and Donald Blake lent instruments and sampling canisters to a few residents so they could measure the chemicals in the air.

Baker said the data attained by residents shows

elevated volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, which could be relatively innocuous or toxic.

Baker said further analysis needs to be done to determine the nature of the VOCs.

“It’s frustrating that it’s residents and UCI advisors who are pushing this through,” said Kevin Lien, a resident who lives near the asphalt factory. “You know, instead of having a resident call to complain and then the city forming a group to figure this out, we’re the one pushing them. If we didn’t do this, none of this will be happening, even though there have been hundreds, thousands of complaints.”

Baker said he knows from reports that the facility is required to file with the South Coast Air Quality Management District that it emits hydrocarbons, sulfur compounds, heavy metals and poly-aromatic hydrocarbons, which are carcinogenic.

The asphalt facility is in the purview of the regional air regulator.

Residents and the city have laid blame on the South Coast Air Quality Management District for not doing enough to curb

the asphalt factory’s emissions even though it’s been investigating the factory for more than a year. At one point, the city stated on its online page that “the agency’s actions have fallen short.”

In response, the management district held an online community forum last week with local leaders and residents.

Among those in attendance at the meeting were county Supervisor Lisa Bartlett, Irvine Councilman Anthony Kuo and Khan.

Several South Coast AQMD employees spoke at the meeting, detailing its ongoing investigation of the asphalt facility.

The agency has conducted more than 30 on-site visits and issued five notices of violation to the facility for public nuisance since the beginning of the investigation last year and one for rules- and permit-related issues observed during inspections.

Nicholas Sanchez, assistant chief deputy counsel, said All American Asphalt is attempting to rectify the issues through installing a carbon absorption system and replacing burners in the asphalt oil heater to

help control the odors. The agency issued a research permit earlier this month that will allow it to evaluate the effectiveness of the carbon absorption system.

South Coast AQMD will also take air samples at Northwood High and Canyon View Elementary schools, which are near the facility. The agency will collect eight to 10 “events” over a two-month period and evaluate the data and next steps. The data from these samples will be posted online.

“This issue remains a top priority for me and I am committed to doing everything within my authority as a member of the SCAQMD Governing Board to address the community’s concerns,” Bartlett said in an emailed statement.

Lindsay Reilly, spokeswoman for Rep. Katie Porter, said that their office is monitoring the situation with All American Asphalt.

Porter’s office attended the South Coast AQMD meeting last week and met with UC Irvine professors on Monday to discuss the facility.

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Neighbors, witnesses say Fullerton police should be held accountable for May shooting of suspect

BY BEN BRAZIL

Bill Brown could only watch as his friend was shot to death by a Fullerton police officer in his frontyard.

Powerless at the time, now Brown, neighbors and friends are working to hold the Fullerton Police Department and Officer Jonathan Ferrell accountable for the death of Hector Hernandez.

The group has held protests and attended City Council meetings to get the attention of city leaders.

"He literally executed him," Brown said.

The incident occurred on May 27 on West Avenue.

According to a video posted online by Fullerton police, one of Hernandez's sons called the police to report his stepfather for being drunk, hitting his brother and brandishing a knife. The boy also reported that Hernandez had armed himself with a gun and fired the weapon. The video includes a recording of the 911 call.

After police arrive on scene, body-worn camera footage of the shooting in the police video shows Ferrell approaching Hernandez's home with his K-9 unit. Officers have their guns drawn.

As he gets up to the home, Ferrell directs the dog toward Hernandez, who is standing in his frontyard with his hands up. The dog disobeys at first and runs toward other officers.

As the K-9 turns and rushes toward Hernandez to take him down, Hernandez puts one of his arms down and takes a knife from his pocket. After the dog takes him down, he stabs the dog near the shoulder blade.

Ferrell runs up to Hernandez, yells "He's got a knife!" and fires two shots at him.

Ferrell pulls the dog from Hernandez while it tears away at his shirt.

Brown and others contend that the dog should never have been directed



Photos by Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

PEOPLE STAND outside the Fullerton Community Center with posters of Hector Hernandez on Tuesday.

toward Hernandez. Brown said the dog didn't even perceive Hernandez as a threat at first, as evidenced by it initially walking over to officers.

Brown said Hernandez had his hands raised and only lowered his hand to his knife when the dog rushed him. Then, Ferrell fired at Hernandez while he was on his back.

"The K-9 officer got concerned about his dog," Brown said. "The K-9 officer wasn't being threatened at all. Nobody in the frontyard was threatened, other than the dog, because the dog was attacking him."

Brown continued: "I mean he just got totally reckless because it was like he just got tunnel vision. He focused on, 'Oh my God he's hurting my dog, I'm gonna stop him now ...' That's exactly what it seems like happened — he lost all control of his training and reasonable thinking and just decided, I need to do this."

Garo Mardirossian, the

attorney who represented Kelly Thomas' family after he was beaten to death by Fullerton officers in 2011, is representing Hernandez's family in a lawsuit against the city.

Mardirossian said Thursday that Ferrell used excessive force when no force was necessary because Hernandez was complying with every order the officers gave him.

"This K-9 officer for no good reason releases his dog," Mardirossian said. "The dog is smart enough to see that there is no danger and starts running towards his K-9 unit. He's thinking 'OK, time to go.' This man's got his hands up, he's no threat."

"Then you see the officers yelling, trying to get [the dog] back and redirected, and to heel and then to attack. Why, why are you taking a man with his hands up?"

He continued: "Neither one of those shots were necessary. Nobody was being threatened."

Fullerton police spokesman Billy Phu said the incident is being reviewed by the department's Internal Affairs Unit.

Phu said Ferrell is still employed with the department and is serving in the field.

When asked whether Ferrell had been suspended, Phu responded: "Once the investigations are complete, any responsive information will be released in accordance to Senate Bill 1421 and the Public Records Act."

Brown and others showed up to a Fullerton City Council meeting on Tuesday night to provide public comments.

They came with signs and spoke about the need for accountability.

"I think that it is important to address the immediate concern and that is the officer involved needs to be immediately off the streets, off the payroll, out of any ability to harm people in the future," said Jeff LeTorneau. "He was upset about the stabbing of a dog,

a dog which probably should never have been used on a person with an agitated emotional state, and that in turn led to the wholesale assassination and murder in plain view of a father of two kids.

"And that just can't stand. So I'm going to leave you with this urgent call for the beginning of an earnest effort to set up a city civilian police review commission with full subpoena powers ..."

Kelly Williams said she witnessed the shooting of Hernandez.

"Fullerton Police Department policy calls for de-escalation techniques to be used when appropriate," Williams said at the meeting. "Officers received training every two years as mandated by post. This did not take place that night of May 27. Exhaust all our alternatives before shooting. Officers should evaluate the use of other reasonably available resources and techniques when determining whether to use deadly

force. Hector's life matters, and now his two sons do not have a father."

The Democratic Party of Orange County has also been showing support for the effort to hold the Fullerton Police Department accountable for Hernandez's death.

The group sent an email to all members this week encouraging them to submit public comments to the Fullerton council meeting to support "Justice for Hector" and police accountability.

Mike Rodriguez, a committee member of the Democratic Party of O.C., submitted a public comment to be read aloud.

"What happened to Hector Hernandez on May 27 was a travesty, and now he has two young sons who are left to fend for themselves without their father," Rodriguez wrote, also adding support for the formation of a civilian oversight committee.

Rodriguez's comment and a few others in support of Hernandez were not read aloud at the council meeting. City Clerk Lucinda Williams said staff inadvertently attached an incorrect coversheet to the agenda.

Kimberly Edds, a spokeswoman for the district attorney's office, said the office is still investigating the incident.

"These investigations can be very complex and can take several months for toxicology and other necessary tests to be completed and reviewed," Edds said in a statement. "At District Atty. Spitzer's insistence, separate biological specimens are preserved for independent testing by the family. Once the investigation and legal review is completed, it is ultimately reviewed by the elected District Atty. Todd Spitzer who then makes the final decision."

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Court orders Orange County sheriff to cut jail population in half to prevent spread of virus

BY LEILA MILLER

A Superior Court judge has ordered that the Orange County jail population be cut in half, ruling that the sheriff had failed to reduce the number of inmates to ensure adequate social distancing.

The move came in response to a lawsuit filed in April by the American Civil Liberties Union against Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes, seeking the release of medically vulnerable and disabled inmates as well as necessary measures to protect those remaining in the jails from the coronavirus.

Judge Peter Wilson ruled Friday that the sheriff had

shown “deliberate indifference” to the serious harm that the virus can pose to medically vulnerable people in custody, violating their state constitutional rights.

“The uncontested facts found here include that conditions in the jail do not permit proper social distancing, there is no mandatory testing of staff or asymptomatic detainees after intake, and no strictly enforced policy of requiring masks for all staff interaction with inmates,” he wrote.

Barnes said in a statement that the order would result in the release of more than 1,800 inmates, many of

whom have been convicted of or are awaiting trial for violent crimes, and that he was evaluating options for appeal.

“This order put our community at substantial risk and does not take into account the impact on the victims of these crimes,” he said.

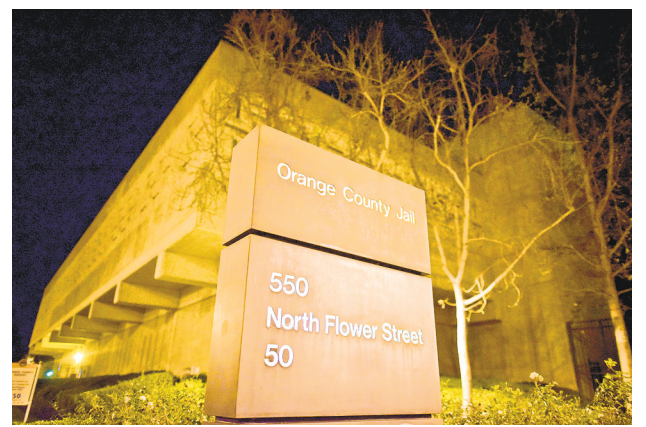
Since March, at least 691 inmates have tested positive for the virus in the county’s jail system. The ruling came a day after the Orange County Sheriff’s Department announced an outbreak involving 74 inmates, reporting a total of 102 cases of the virus.

“This very unfortunate development confirms the

need to take all reasonable steps to ensure that if an outbreak occurs at the Jail, that outbreak is contained to the fullest extent reasonably possible,” Wilson wrote.

The judge ordered Barnes to reduce the population in all congregated living areas by 50%, including all dormitory and barracks-style housing and multi-person cells. He also instructed Barnes to provide a release plan by Dec. 31 that lists all medically vulnerable inmates, and to identify measures to protect all people in that category who won’t be released or transferred from jail.

He ordered Barnes to



Stuart Palley | For The Times

SINCE LAST MARCH, at least 691 inmates have tested positive for the coronavirus in the Orange County jails.

maintain the reductions “until the current COVID-19 emergency is declared terminated” and to impose a strict policy for staff members to wear face masks anytime they are within six feet of an inmate.

“The court’s decision to alleviate the pressure on the jail by depopulating will help prevent the medical infrastructure — in the jail and in the surrounding commu-

nity — from becoming totally overwhelmed,” Daisy Ramirez, jail conditions and policy coordinator at the ACLU of Southern California, said in a statement. “This order recognizes that we must not forget the humanity of incarcerated people, and they should not be put in mortal danger.”

LEILA MILLER is a reporter for the Los Angeles Times.

HODSON

Continued from page R1

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, said 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



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 2013.

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 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 says, changed everything.

The first happened Nov. 9, 2015. During a Stanford practice, Hodson says, Dunning had her and teammate Madi Bugg perform the “courage” drill.

In a 2012 YouTube video, Dunning demonstrates the drill, which he says 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 said 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 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 con-

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HODSON

Continued from page R4

cussion 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.”

‘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.”

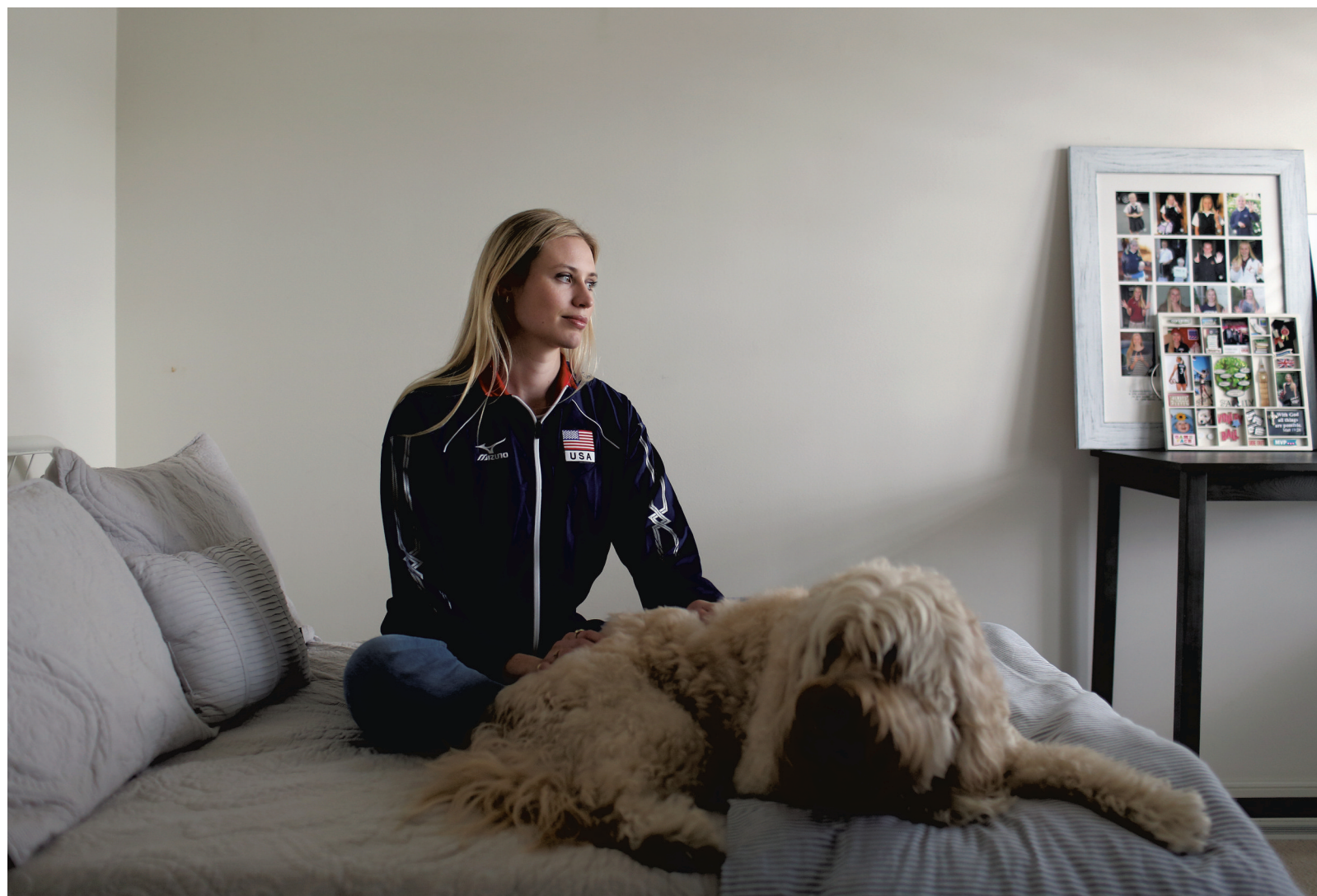
In early September 2016, Hodson’s parents visited Palo Alto. Jimmy had printed out a checklist of depression symptoms. In their daughter’s room, Sonya said, “I was checking them off, one after the other.” A Stanford psychiatrist, unaffiliated with the athletic department, diagnosed Hodson with clinical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



Dania Maxwell | Los Angeles Times

HAYLEY HODSON sits with her dog, Buddy, at her parents’ Newport Beach home. Hodson doesn’t want other college athletes to sacrifice their health for sport.

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 said, 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 said, “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 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 professor 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 says, “were working at 10%.”

Franklin said her impaired concentration and reaction time made it dangerous for her to continue playing volleyball, Hodson says. (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 medically 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 matches during high school.

A top recruit in 2013, Williams went to Oregon, suffered a debilitating concussion during summer workouts and left the school before ever playing a match.

Hodson also heard from Jordyn Schnabl, a Long Beach native who said that during her senior year at North Carolina in 2015, she took a ball to the head that produced a career-ending concussion diagnosis and left her with long-term symptoms including excruciating headaches and vertigo.

“I felt like I needed to reach out to Hayley,” Schnabl said. “I wanted to see how she was coping. And I wanted to know, ‘Am I an 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 says “safeguarding the well-being” of athletes is its mission, but it neither

makes nor enforces binding concussion care and management rules for its member schools.

“There’s no accountability,” Hodson said. “There are good people in the system, but it’s not set up to look out for kids.”

Hodson’s lawsuit against the NCAA and Stanford is in discovery. According to her Los Angeles-based attorney, Robert Finnerty, a trial could occur next year or in 2022 depending on how the COVID-19 pandemic affects civil court scheduling.

In addition to damages for pain, suffering and lost volleyball income, Hodson’s suit seeks to force 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.

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