

# accent

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## SUNDAY REFLECTIONS

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# Gold, not girls, mattered as Nassar's abuse went unchecked

**S**eventy women. As in 70. And not women, really. Girls. That's how many female athletes the lecher Larry Nassar sexually abused between the time the FBI first learned of the allegations and when he was arrested by Michigan officials on separate information.

Nassar, the former doctor for the USA Gymnastics team, who will spend the rest of his wretched life rotting in prison for abusing hundreds of female patients, including Olympian Simone Biles, was free to defile 70 female athletes while the FBI fell asleep at the wheel.

A scathing report by the Justice Department's inspector

general released on July 14 detailed the FBI's shoddy and indifferent handling of the Nassar case. It took an investigation by the Indianapolis Star to light a fire under these sluggards. Yes, the press, the same institution that exposed the priest pedophilia scandal.

Now we can count the FBI, the nation's premier law en-

forcement agency, among the key organizations that refused to listen to these women and did nothing to stop the molestation.

Does gold mean so much?

Or do girls mean so little?

Nassar had been manhandling the genitals of little girls for decades. And girls began complaining as far back as 2004.

Think about the guts it takes for a girl to speak out against such treatment. Then consider her reaction when no adult, no agency, no law enforcement authority listens.

It wasn't just the FBI. Plenty of adults — including at least 11 Michigan State University

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## REFLECTIONS: Rampant abuse

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officials, what was then the U.S. Olympic Committee, and USA Gymnastics — heard these complaints, which date to 2004. They “knowingly concealed” it, according to a 2019 Senate investigation

The perps included John Geddert, head coach of the 2012 women's Olympic gymnastics team, who killed himself in February after being charged with human trafficking, forced labor and sexually assaulting a teenage girl. Former gymnast Sarah Klein, who said Geddert began his 10-year abuse of her when she was 8, described the training environment as one of “screaming, throwing, hitting, starvation, disallowing any sense of self to ever be formed.”

“It's very difficult to read and see all that went wrong, particularly when it's a serial offender like this,” said Donna Palomba, founder of Jane Doe No More. “You would think this would have been an urgent priority, to hold this predator accountable and to stop him from contin-

uing this behavior.”

Palomba, who had her own experience being disbelieved after she reported her 1993 rape to the Waterbury Police Department, ultimately winning a civil lawsuit against the department, said the lack of law enforcement investigations dampens victims' appetite to report abuse.

“We are trying to tell girls, especially young girls, that they matter, that they will be believed,” she said. “It's hard to keep encouraging victims to come forward when you see things like this. ... It's revictimization at its worst.”

The Justice Department's report, released just before the start of the Tokyo Olympics, paints a portrait of the FBI's examination of evidence as being so listless and inept that your “CSI”-binging grandmother could have done a better job.

Among its lapses: failing to follow up with key witnesses, and failing to notify other law enforcement agencies, including those in Michigan, to alert them to possible violations of state laws Nassar was committing.

While the FBI dawdled, Nassar continued to prey on and assault girls whose trust he abused and whose emotional stability he shredded. He did so for another solid year.

When Justice Department officials started sniffing around the FBI's Indianapolis field office, agents rushed to cover their tushes. They stuttered, they stammered, they lied or offered patchy information “to minimize errors made by the Indianapolis Field Office,” according to the report.

While Dr. Pervert was molesting girls, key FBI agents went job hunting with the U.S. Olympic Committee. The report found that W. Jay Abbott, head of the Indianapolis field office in charge of the investigation, was reaching out to the former president of USA Gymnastics, hoping to get a job with the Olympic Committee. This is an agent who spoke to only one of the three victims who mustered the guts to report the abuse.

In other words, while this skunk was shopping his resume around, girls — as



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Disgraced doctor Larry Nassar appears in court for his final sentencing phase in February 2018 in Charlotte, Mich.

young as 8 — were being subjected to Nassar's depravities.

Let's be clear here. There was *video* evidence of this crime that the FBI did not properly review, according to the report.

“If over these many years, just one adult listened, and had the courage and character to act, this tragedy could have been avoided,” Olympian Aly Raisman testified at Nassar's 2018 sentencing.

Last week, the Olympics

began. Simone Biles, the most decorated American gymnast of all time, will be going for four medals, which would make her the most decorated gymnast ever.

Let's hope she gets it. Maybe that much gold is what it takes to get someone to listen to you.

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