

Sports



Gervais wrestler Alexys Zepeda spars with teammate Jonathan Cruz. MOLLY J. SMITH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

OSAA adds state title for girls wrestling

Oregon 7th state with championship event

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WILSONVILLE — A year from now, hundreds of high school girls in Oregon will be competing for the first OSAA state girls wrestling championships.

The Oregon School Activities Association's Executive Board voted unanimously Feb. 12 to create a separate state championship division for girls starting in the 2018-19 school year. Oregon will become the seventh state to award state championships for girls wrestling.

"We're excited about making the change for next year with girls wrestling," OSAA Executive Director Peter Weber said. "We think it's an area that's continuing to grow."

Four years ago, there were about 100 girls competing in high school wrestling in Oregon; there are more than 400 girls competing this season.

When Washington started sanctioning girls high school wrestling in 2007, the state had fewer than 200 girls competing. As of 2017, there were more than 1,000.

Currently, girls in Oregon can compete against boys in district and OSAA state tournaments or they can compete against other girls in a separate exhibition state tournament.

Gervais freshman Alexys Zepeda, for example, is competing against boys in the OSAA Class 3A state wrestling tournament Friday and Saturday.

She won her weight classes at the 3A Special District 2 championship against boys and also won in the women's high school state qualifier.

Zepeda had to choose between competing in the girls' exhibition state tournament — which runs concurrently with the OSAA state tournament — or competing with the boys.

She chose to compete with the boys and is the No. 4 seed at 113 pounds.

In the championship model approved by the Executive Board, girls like Zepeda will be able to compete against girls for an official girls state championship or in the bracket against boys starting in the 2018-19 school year.

As opposed to sanctioning girls wrestling as a separate activity in Oregon — as is the case with sports like tennis, basketball and soccer — girls will have their own division for state championship under the wrestling banner, much like how Class 6A is its own division for wrestling.

"Depending on the growth of girls wrestling and as they develop, you could see the OSAA Executive Board request to them to sanction girls wrestling," said OSAA Assistant Executive Director Brad Garrett, who oversees wrestling.

"At this point, while they're growing, they're not there yet. There were a little over 400 certifications for girls this year. We have about 5,000 boys."

Willamina has a traditionally strong wrestling problem for boys but — like most high schools — has experienced a decline in participation in recent years.

"We have some girls wrestling in our middle school," said Willamina principal Tim France, who is on the Executive Board. "I'm hoping that yes, this will be an avenue that will hopefully increase participation."

"I think all we're doing is expanding the possibilities for that gender of the sport to grow. Overall, I think it's going to be a good move for the sport."

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Silverton riding high with '12 strong' chemistry



Silverton head coach Jamie McCarty talks to the team during a time out in a basketball game against Woodburn on Feb. 13 at Woodburn High School. PHOTOS BY MOLLY J. SMITH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Gary Horowitz
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SILVERTON — At midseason first-year Silverton boys basketball coach Jamie McCarty and his players went to see the film "12 Strong."

It evolved into an enduring team bonding experience.

"12 Strong" is the story of 12 Green Berets who volunteered to fight the Taliban on horseback in Afghanistan less than two months after 9/11.

It's a story that resonated with players and symbolized their own team commitment, which is illustrated on the team's black and orange warm-up jerseys with the words 12 STRONG.

"We kind of said hey, we're going that direction this year," McCarty said. "We have 12 on our roster, each one of you is that important to us and our success."

It has been a season-long success story.

No. 1-ranked Silverton (20-1, 12-0 Mid-Willamette Conference) has won 14 games in a row and is a legitimate contender to win the Class 5A state championship.

While players like 6-foot-5-inch senior wing Cade Roth (18.1 points per game, 6.2 rebounds, 3.0 assists), 5-foot-10-inch sophomore point guard David Gonzales (16.3 ppg, 4.0 assists) and 6-foot-4-inch junior post Levi Nielsen (10.8 ppg, 9.2 rpg) lead the Foxes statistically, everyone contributes in their own way.

Senior power forward Clay Martinson, who rounds out the starting lineup with junior forward Josiah Roth, had eight points and 15 rebounds in Friday's 82-57 win at No. 6 South Albany that clinched the conference championship for Silverton.

Senior forward Sam Twede doesn't get much playing time, and jokingly said his role in games is "left bench," but teammates point to him as an inspirational leader.

No one is more animated during games than Twede, who routinely leaps from his seat on the bench and shouts encouragement.

"We all see the heart that he has," Martinson said. "He's an inspiration to all of us."

McCarty has played a major role with his commitment to an aggressive man-to-man defense and rebounding, and he implemented a fast-break style that players embraced.

Mid-Valley high school hoops followers may remember that McCarty was the boys basketball coach at Stayton for nine years. The Eagles won league titles in his last seven seasons, culminated by an appearance in the 2007 4A state championship game — a loss to Baker — in his final game.

McCarty stepped away from high school coaching after the 2006-07 season because as a principal in the North Santiam School District it was determined by administrators that he could not continue to do both jobs.

While McCarty said the career move "was perfect timing" because it gave him more time to spend at home



Silverton's Levi Nielsen (34) goes up for a basket in a game against Woodburn on Feb. 13 at Woodburn High School.

with his wife, Heidi, and their two young children — Brooke and Jordan — he still missed coaching.

"It's always been in my heart. It was a big, big hole," McCarty said of his decade away from high school coaching. "It's my biggest passion and it's a blessing to be back."

Four years ago McCarty became principal at Victor Point and Silver Crest elementary schools in Silverton, and currently holds principal positions at Victor Point and Evergreen Elementary School.

The Silver Falls School District placed no restrictions on McCarty's coaching ambitions, and he was named Silverton boys basketball coach in May. He had the opportunity to work with incoming players last summer in preparation for the 2017-18 season.

McCarty has known many of his current players for years through his principal jobs in Silverton, and because daughter Brooke, a senior on the Silverton girls basketball team, is friends with players on the boys team.

"It's been cool seeing them at the house all the time and then coaching 'em," McCarty said.

Former Silverton coach Steve Roth, who led Silverton to a 5A state championship in 2015, remains on staff as the freshman boys basketball coach. He is Cade and Josiah Roth's uncle.

It has been a smooth transition from Roth to McCarty. Roth also stressed defense and rebounding, but there has been more emphasis on the offensive transition game under McCarty.

"I think he's a great fit for our team," Gonzales said. "I think that he'll continue to build the program. I don't think it will be just a one-year deal."

With three starters due back next season — Gonzales, Nielsen and Josiah Roth (Cade's first cousin) — along with McCarty's track record, there is reason to believe Silverton will remain formidable for years.

The season after Silverton's state championship, the Foxes went 17-8 and lost in the first round of the state playoffs. Last season they slipped to 12-14 and had another first-round playoff exit.

Silverton has a veteran roster that includes Cade Roth, a first team all-league selection last season, and six seniors. There was reason to believe the Foxes would be much improved this season.

But a state championship contender? "I knew coming into it we were gonna be good and it was gonna be fun, but this has definitely exceeded my expectations," Nielsen said.

Silverton has been winning in dominant fashion.

The Foxes, whose only loss came in December against Mater Dei High (Santa Anna, California) in the Capitol City Classic at Willamette University, are averaging 68.0 points per game and giving up 44.7. They lead the state in scoring defense.

"We've been so unselfish and everybody knows what they bring to the team and everybody executes it every game," Cade Roth said. "We don't take a game off."

The Foxes also have benefitted from the addition of Nick McWilliams to the coaching staff.

McWilliams, who led the South Salem girls team to back-to-back 6A state championships in 2015 and 2016, is not surprised by McCarty's early success at Silverton. He recalls coaching against McCarty's Stayton teams when he was boys coach at Central.

"He was one of best prepared coaches that I ever went against," said McWilliams, an English teacher at Silverton. "There's no question that he's a great coach and I think all those years off stoked that fire even more."

It's home stretch time for the Foxes, who close the regular season next week with home games against Central and Dallas, followed by the state playoffs.

If Silverton wins its first playoff game March 3, it would advance to the eight-team state tournament March 7-9 at Gill Coliseum in Corvallis. The last time the Foxes played at Gill they cut down the nets, and their state championship banner hangs in the school gymnasium.

"I'm ready to hang another one," Cade Roth said.

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