



Angelika Dietrich photo

The 73rd running of the Chief Joseph Days rodeo begins tonight with the first of four days of PRCA action.

Gates open on CJD rodeo

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

About two years ago, Chief Joseph Days was named by western writer Gavin Ehinger as one of the top-10 must-see rodeos in the West.

It enters this rodeo season with more accolades after earning the 2017 Columbia River Circuit "Medium Size Rodeo of the Year" award and being named a "Best Fest in the West" by the magazine *Cowboys and Indians*, according to a press release.

"What it says is that we've worked really hard to enhance our rodeo, to market our rodeo," Chief Joseph Days President Terry Jones told *The Observer* ahead of the 73rd edition of the rodeo. "We have a really good group of directors and committee people who are really dedicated to the rodeo. We also have a good marketing person. Marketing is really important."

The four-night Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association rodeo, perhaps the highlight of the week-long event, kicks off tonight.

While the awards would indicate the rodeo is operating near top form annually, Jones said the board of directors is always looking for ways to improve the event.

"Every year you learn something new," Jones said. "You learn how you can make things better. We're just not caught up in (saying), 'We've done it this way for 73 years, so we're going to keep doing it this way.' We're open to new things and new ideas."

That includes everything from updating facilities and grounds, to having top-of-the-line animals from stock contractors, to bringing in a different range of acts.

New this year, in fact, is Madison McDonald, a five-time National Finals Rodeo trick-riding performer.

"There's getting to be fewer and fewer good PRCA acts, but we always try to bring in the top acts," Jones said. "We've put a lot of emphasis on maintaining and improving our facilities, from the dirt to the grandstands to the building. We've done a lot there."

Jones added the people — from board members all the way to volunteers — are an

integral part of the rodeo success.

"That's what makes our rodeo good and great is the people," he said. "To make it all happen beyond the board, there's in the neighborhood of 300 to 400 volunteers (each year)."

CJD will take the time Friday, in fact, to honor a man who gave several years to the rodeo. Dave Turner, son-in-law of co-rodeo founder Harley Tucker, died recently.

"He was involved for years at all different kinds of capacities," Jones said of Turner, noting he served as president, grand marshal and stage coach handler, among other tasks. "His wife, Darlene Turner, is Harley Tucker's daughter. Darlene has been involved with Chief Joseph Days her whole life. With her involvement, Dave was involved."

The tribute to Turner will take place just before Friday night's rodeo performance.

The rodeo itself begins at 7 p.m. all four nights. Admission is \$15 Wednesday and Thursday. General admission is \$17 Friday and Saturday, and reserved seating is \$20.

Mills named men's soccer coach at EOU

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

Eastern Oregon University has named its new men's soccer coach just in time for the start of fall practice.

The Mountaineers announced Monday that Zach Mills, who comes to EOU from Southwest Mississippi Community College, will take over as the program's third head coach.

"Through the interview process, it was evident that Zach shares the core values that we see as important within our department," Anji Weissenfuh, EOU athletic director, said in a press release.

Mills was drawn to the prospective job in part to having Oregon connections. He has family in Portland, Beaverton and Bend, to name a few cities.

"Actually, most of my family is in Oregon. In my opinion, (the EOU coaching job fit) really well. I am very family oriented."

He noticed a sense of family when he came to La Grande to visit with the athletic department.

"As soon as I got there, I could tell," he said. "I loved the atmosphere. I felt super comfortable."

Mills was the head coach at SMCC for two seasons, and had ample success in his time with the Bears. In those two years, the program posted a record of 23-10-2, and won at least 10 games in both seasons. In the process, he led the team to its first ever berths in the MACJC conference tournament, reaching the semifinals his first season and the quarterfinals in 2017.

SMCC went 13-6 in 2016, averaged 2.7 goals per game while allowing 1.7, and had five shutouts. A year ago, the Bears went 10-4-2, averaged 2.8 goals per game and allowed just 1.4 goals per game. They also registered four shutouts.

The previous four years, SMCC had a combined record of 16-42-7, and never recorded more than seven wins in a season.

One of the reasons for the turnaround was Mills' ability to bring the right players on the team. That included players from Argentina, which he was able to recruit after the school was allowed to bring in international players.

"Mainly the international rule helps," Mills said. "I have an eye for talent. When I find those guys I try not to recruit based on just numbers."

See Mills / Page 7A

BRIEFLY

Swim club meeting set for Aug. 9

The La Grande Swim Club will hold its annual general meeting at 6 p.m. Aug. 9 at the Pioneer Park Pavilion. Contact Board President Tatiana Ricker at 541-963-5961 for more information.

UC Lightning 10U squad has strong season

Observer staff

If the success the UC Lightning 10U softball team had in the spring and early summer is any indication, the future of softball in the region is bright.

The 10U squad played in five tournaments this season and had four top-two finishes. That included a win in the final tournament of the season, the Boise Blast Tournament, in late June.

The team, which posted an overall record of 19-7-1 on the season, went 6-1 in that final tournament. The Lightning opened with five straight wins, beating the Idaho Crossfire, 1-0, the Idaho Vipers, 6-2, the Idaho Patriots, 21-1 in three innings, the Boise Blast, 22-1, in three innings,

and Utah, 5-2. The last of those wins put them in the final and a rematch against the Crossfire, needing just one win in two games for the title. They lost the first game, 12-6, but took the second, 12-4.

Earlier in the season, they took fourth at the Ashley Hodgen Memorial softball tournament with a 1-3 record, then took second at the Walla Walla Sportsplex (4-1 record), second the Mother's Day tournament in Tri-Cities (4-1-1 record) and second at the Walla Walla Sweet Onion Tournament (4-1 record).

"They've had a really successful summer, probably the most successful summer a 10U team from (Union County) has ever had," Jamey Seavert, head coach, said.



Jamey Seavert photo

The 10U UC Lightning softball team went 19-7-1 this spring and summer. Front row, from left, is Madison Brock, Addison Dunham, Maddy Seavert and Karlie Howton. Back row, from left, is Bethany Petty, Cassidy Hogge, Austyn Meuser, Raellee Smith, Karli Kretschmer and Ava Roe.

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