

## New-look Mountaineers are ready to TAKE THE COURT

■ EOU volleyball team begins 2018 season today in Spokane, Washington, with nine new players

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

Eastern Oregon volleyball Head Coach Kaki McLean-Morehead believes there is a high ceiling for her volleyball team.

But with a young squad composed primarily of newcomers and underclassmen, it could take some time for that potential to be met this fall.

The Mountaineers, who graduated six seniors off of last year's team that reached the round of 16 at the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics national tournament last fall, begin their season today at the Spokane Valley Tournament with nine new players — six freshmen and three transfers — blending in with the program's eight returners.

Where last year's team was veteran-led, this year's group has just two seniors and five juniors among its 17 pieces.

"It's hard to mesh and figure stuff out with that many people, but on the other side of that I think that our potential is there," said McLean-Morehead, who is entering her 12th season as head coach. "It's just going to be something that we have to continually work on, (but) the room for growth is huge."

The blend of newcomers and returners has to work to replace a group of players who were part of the best four-year run in program history. That list includes career kill leader Amanda Miller and three of the top five players in blocks in program history, Emily Nay, Isabelle Statkus and Madisen Garlie. Also graduated are Malia Mills and Amy Arnzen.

Holli Mullins, one of the two returning seniors, believes the new faces are up to the challenge, and they're proving themselves during early practices.

"We had a lot of seniors leave, and there are big shoes to fill, definitely, but these freshmen are phenomenal," Mullins said. "They have a lot of talent."

One plus for the young Mounties is all eight returners had an impact to some degree a year ago. McLean-Morehead said she is expecting those players to lead the team and also show the younger players how to adapt to the college game.

"I expect a lot from them and (will be) relying on them quite a bit this weekend, but I also expect them to show the way," she said. "(We) have that expectation that we want to compete for every point, but also we want to improve. I'll look to them a lot this weekend."

Back for EOU on the front line is junior Megan Bunn, who was second in kills last year with 305, and junior Hallee Ackerman, who tallied 187 kills in 2017. Eastern also returns all three setters — Madison Pilon, Abby Smith and Sarah Carpenter — from last fall. Pilon led the team with 771 assists in 2017.

Also back are six players who registered 100 or more digs in 2017, led by defending Cascade Collegiate Conference freshman of the year Kiley McMurtrey (544 digs) and Mullins (245).

The back line defense may, in fact, be one of the strengths this fall.

"We're doing really well at our scrappiness," Bunn said. "We're doing well at getting balls up and keeping it live."

McLean-Morehead noted her defensive specialists have played well during the first two weeks of practice.

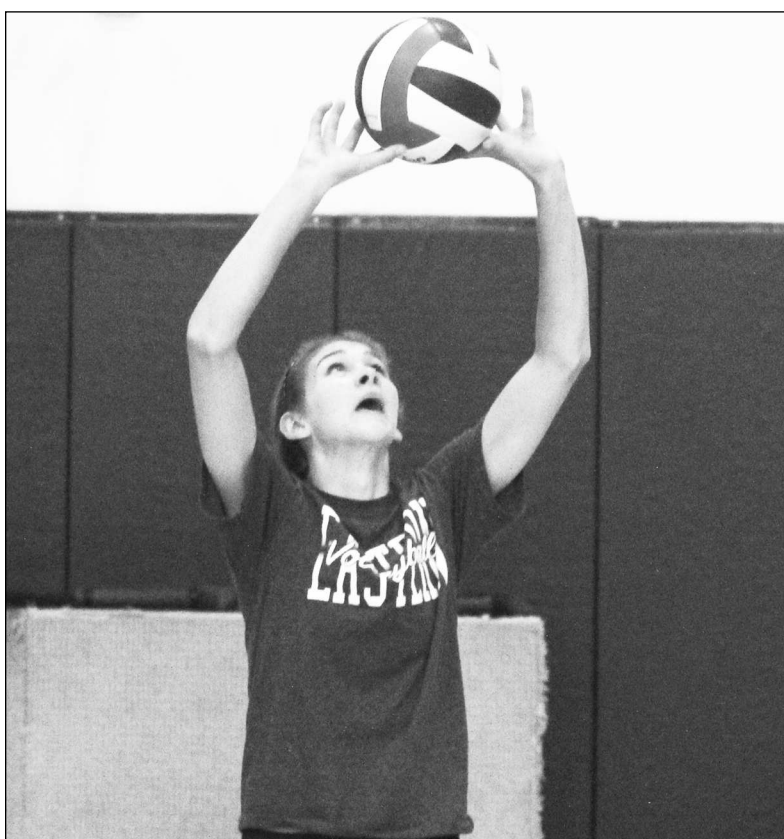
Conversely, one of the top areas for growth is one that has been a strength in recent years: blocking.

"We need to get a lot better at reading our hitters," McLean-Morehead said. "We need to get a lot better at passing. That's definitely one area that has been a strength



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Senior Holli Mullins, front, reaches for a dig in front of teammates Kiley McMurtrey, left, and Aspen Christiansen during practice Thursday morning. The three are the top returning defensive specialists for EOU.



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Sophomore setter Madison Pilon is among the returners for EOU. Pilon had a team-best 771 assists and added 222 digs in 2017.



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Freshman Jet Taylor, of Rigby, Idaho, is one of the nine new members of the EOU volleyball team this fall.

the last three years, and it might be a weakness this year just because we have to go back to the basics and watch (for) the right things."

The coach expects to use every player available to her during the first few matches of the season — though McMurtrey is likely to

### EOU Volleyball

#### KEY MATCHES

Today: Carroll College (season opener), first of three matches at Spokane Valley Tournament  
Tuesday: Whitman College (home opener), Quinn Coliseum, 5 p.m.  
Aug. 31: Southern Oregon at Eastern Oregon (CCC opener), Quinn Coliseum, 7 p.m.  
Sept. 22: EOU at Corban (first match vs. last year's CCC champion), Salem, 7 p.m.  
Sept. 27: EOU at College of Idaho (first match vs. this year's CCC coaches' poll champion), Caldwell, Idaho, 6 p.m.  
Nov. 2: C of I at EOU (regular season finale), Quinn Coliseum, 7 p.m.

Source: eousports.com

be limited at the Spokane tournament as she recovers from a quad strain — to get a better feel for what her rotations will be as the season progresses.

Among the incoming freshmen, she pointed to Jet Taylor, Cambree Scott and Breanna Shaffer as players who have stepped up their game during practices.

Bunn said the biggest adjustment for the incoming freshmen is adapting to the speed of the game at the college level.

"The pace is a lot different," she said. "The tempo is a lot quicker. I think that's something they're adapting to really well."

The coach knows there "could be some lumps" the team has to work through during the season.

But getting on the floor this weekend will be a step toward showing her what the Mountaineers need to hone in on and if they will be a contender in the CCC.

"I can't say what our goal will be in the long run, (but) I do know we're going to be a lot better in November than we are right now," she said.

Mullins added if the Mountaineers put out a full effort in the opening weekend, they should come away in good shape.

"If we have that mindset (to give 100 percent) and the mindset of not giving up, just keep going, keep pushing. I think (we'll get) really good results," she said.

## Special Olympics Oregon events canceled

■ Lingerin financial problems also result in more than half of staff being laid off

By Jeff Manning  
The Oregonian

Special Olympics of Oregon is struggling through a financial crisis that has forced the nonprofit to cancel statewide athletic events and lay off more than half its staff, officials confirmed Wednesday.

The organization has lost money four years running, is heavily in debt with no reserves and is out of compliance with certain loan covenants. It's also struggling to pay the bills: Its "trade payables" surpassed \$1 million in 2017, and event officials concede some of its increasingly restive vendors haven't been compensated for a year.

Special Olympics' financial condition has worsened since then, confirmed Britt Carlson Oase, the organization's new chief executive officer. But it's impossible to know how much worse as the 2017 annual report has yet to be finalized. Special Olympics declined The Oregonian/OregonLive's request for up-to-date data.

Oase, who was hired in June, is approaching wealthy Oregonians for a lifeline. "I've reached out to some of the pillars of the community," she said. The nonprofit also implemented a spending freeze and "suspended the summer, fall and winter games."

Oase attributed the financial problems to a mismatch between the program spending and charitable giving that keep the organization afloat.

Oase said she's seen no evidence of malfeasance — "I believe that everyone involved has the best of intentions" — but the charity's board of directors has ordered a forensic audit nonetheless.

Special Olympics of Oregon runs athletic competitions statewide for 14,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities. It also oversees 30 local Special Olympics volunteer organizations that offer ongoing sports training.

The nonprofit's financial position has steadily worsened and ended 2014, 2015 and 2016 with deficits. Then came 2017, when seemingly everything that could go wrong did.

Among other things, Special Olympics moved its summer fundraiser — The Bite of Oregon — from Waterfront Park to the outdoor plaza adjacent to the Moda Center. The nonprofit hoped the change of scenery would inject new life into the event.

Instead it got significantly smaller crowds, partly because it happened on a weekend when wildfires were raging in the Columbia River Gorge. Oase said she's encouraged by the response so far to her requests for help. The nonprofit will move from its headquarters in Southwest Portland to donated space. A company has volunteered to provide IT support. "The community has really stepped up in an amazing way," she said.