

WOMEN'S COLLEGE SOCCER



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Eastern Oregon women's soccer players Nan Kiebert, front left, Kaitlyn McLeod, center, and Natalie Mitchell, front right, jockey for possession during practice, which moved inside to Quinn Coliseum Monday afternoon due to smoke.

Looking for a repeat

■ EOU women's soccer team, which is after its second CCC title, begins season today

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

The Eastern Oregon women's soccer team gained some notoriety before it played an official match this fall. It was named the coaches' favorite to win the Cascade Collegiate Conference and was ranked 25th in the national preseason coaches' poll — its first ranking ever.

But as they begin their season today with high expectations — including hopes to repeat as CCC champions and get beyond the first round of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics national tournament — the Mountaineers know they can't rest on their laurels or on what others may think of their potential.

"You lose one game, and that ranking goes away," senior Taylor Boyer said. "We try not to focus too much on the rankings and what people are saying about us, but how we're playing as a team."

EOU is coming off of one of the best seasons in program history when it went 13-4-2, won its first CCC title and reached the national tournament for the first time. The Mountaineers also brought back several key players from that team, and lost only six seniors.

But the taste of last year's 1-0 loss in the opening round to Westmont, California, is something Boyer and the Mountaineers are looking to use as a driving force in 2018.

"What I remember saying to the team after that game was 'Remember how this feels right now. When we come back (to work), remember what you were feeling after that game, remember the sadness and the anger and the hurt that comes with losing at the national tournament,'" Boyer said.

Jacob Plocher, who enters his second season as EOU head coach, said his takeaway from that match was the need for consistency, and believes if the team can grow in that area this fall, the sky's the limit.

"It just comes down to trusting the process, understanding there's going to be some hurdles and some setbacks, and keeping the eyes on the prize," he said.

The potential EOU has this fall has shown in spurts in its preseason scrimmages, but



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Goalkeeper Cydni Cottrell, shown scooping up a ball at practice Monday, recorded eight shutouts for the Mountaineers a year ago.

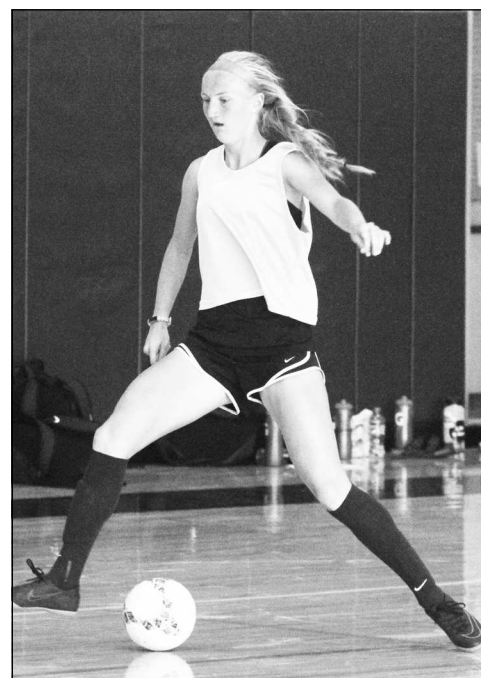
Plocher said he's still looking for the team to have that consistency.

"There are moments when we're on and it looks awesome, and I'm truly excited for the group that we have," he said. "And then there's times that we have to get back to the basics, make sure everyone is on the same page and (is) working hard."

Along with Boyer, an NAIA honorable mention all-American who scored six goals a year ago, EOU returns several attackers. That includes 2017 leading scorer Natalie Mitchell, who netted seven goals; Cailin Koupal and Morgan Farrington, who each scored three goals last fall; and Nan Kiebert, who scored twice. In fact, 23 of EOU's 26 goal scorers from last year return. Seniors Abri Cardenas and Sarah Lynch, sophomore Camie Edgington and freshman MacKinley Gregus are among those who should factor in on offense.

Plocher said if the returners can mesh with the freshmen and transfers he brought in during the offseason, the offense could be much more potent.

"That's just (understanding) the chemistry and the feel for how each other plays and what we're looking for," he said. "We have a



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Senior Chelsey Nicol is among the returning defenders for EOU this fall.

lot of speed, (and) we have a lot of depth as well. We are definitely capable of being more

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COLLEGE VOLLEYBALL

EOU netters use full arsenal, win home opener

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

The Eastern Oregon volleyball team is spending a lot of time in its early-season matches tinkering with different lineups and rotations, as it continues to find what will work best with its bevy of newcomers.

That reality was played out in spades in Tuesday's home opener as all 17 Mountaineers got on the court and contributed in the team's three-set sweep of Whitman College, 25-19, 25-15, 25-10 at Quinn Coliseum.

"We tried a lot of different things tonight as far as lineups," Head Coach Kaki McLean-Morehead said. "I thought the girls did well at adapting. There are always things we still need to work on, but it's a good start."

The coach blended lineups throughout the night to not only find the best possible rotations but to also help build the team's depth.

"Depth goes a long way, especially (when you get to) the national tournament," she said. "I think if we can have that early, it's a big step to get to where we need to."

Megan Bunn and Hailee Ackerman, who have been at the forefront of Eastern's attack in the early stages of the season, were strong again Tuesday. Bunn had a match-high 12 kills. Ackerman added seven. In all, 12 players for EOU recorded a kill on the match.

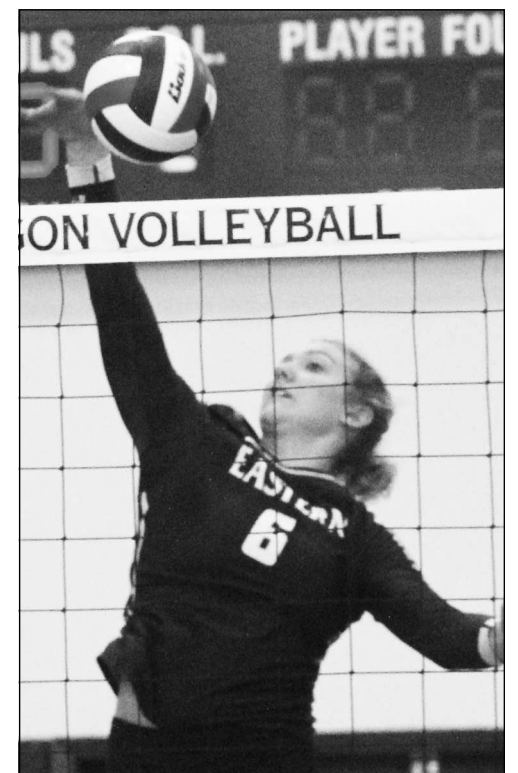
Ackerman said using the variety of rotations is actually something EOU does a lot in practice.

"We had a lot of different rotations that we tried and a lot of different things thrown together (on Tuesday)," the junior said. "I thought we did a really good job of all coming together as a team, putting the ball away and working together."

On the court, Eastern was barely challenged after a tight first set. Bunn had six kills and Breanna Shaffer added five kills in the opening set, which Eastern took control of with a pair of 4-0 runs before Ackerman and freshman Jet Taylor combined for a block to close out the set.

Taylor Tibbetts, another of Eastern's newcomers, showed her potential during EOU's 8-0 run to start the second set. The junior college transfer accounted for half of the points in the brief spurt with two kills and two blocks, and finished the set — the only one she played

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Ronald Bond/The Observer

Eastern Oregon's Megan Bunn tallied 12 kills during the Mountaineers' sweep of Whitman College on Tuesday.



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