



No. 4 Southern Oregon
at
Eastern Oregon
1 p.m. Sat., Community Stadium

EOU's Zach Lacey, left, and Kye Yraguen, right, run down SOU's Tanner Trosin during last year's game. Trosin is gone, but the Raiders bring back several key players from 2017. Observer file photo

■ Mountaineers square off against in-state rival and No. 4-ranked Southern Oregon as they look for second 2-0 start in three years

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

One point.
That is all that has separated the Eastern Oregon Mountaineers and the Southern Oregon Raiders in their previous four contests — two wins by EOU, and two by SOU.
The in-state rivalry will be renewed Saturday when the fourth-ranked Raiders come to Community Stadium for their season opener, while Eastern aims for a second straight win to start 2018.
“(In) the Frontier Conference, you can have rivalries all over the place, but this is something special. This is

in the state of Oregon,” EOU head coach Tim Camp said of the game he’s called the “small college Civil War.” “There are bragging rights that go with this one. I live for games like this.”
The last two meetings in La Grande were must-see instant classics that came down to the wire. EOU batted away a pass in the end zone on the final play of the game to claim the 2016 season opener, 45-40. Last October, the Mountaineers were on the cusp of a game-winning touchdown and an upset of undefeated SOU, but a collision between two Mountaineers resulted in a

fumble the Raiders recovered at the two-yard line with just 1:31 left as they escaped with a 31-27 win.
In fact, one has to go back to 2013 to find a game between the two teams decided by more than 11 points, and six of the last nine meetings have been decided by five points or fewer.
“No matter if one team is really good that year and the other one is down, it seems like we always match up well,” EOU senior offensive lineman Mick Wilson said. “I’ve played them six times, and I think just twice it’s been decided by more than single digits. It’s always a big

game. It’s fun to play. They play football the right way.”
What’s more, it’s a rivalry that in recent history has been dominated by the visiting team. In the last 11 contests, the home team has just a 3-8 record, with SOU going 5-1 in Community Stadium and EOU posting a 3-2 record when it hits the road.
That’s a number Eastern hopes to change Saturday as it tries to move to 2-0 on the new Community turf.
“I told these guys we had no other option but to win that game (last Saturday) to show the com-

munity and the administration how much we appreciate their support,” Camp said. “We’re taking the same approach. We’re going to take one game at a time. We have to protect our home. We’ve got something now, and we have to take a lot of pride in that.”
EOU will match up against an SOU squad that went undefeated in Frontier Conference play and was on the verge of a berth in the national title game in 2017.
But the most vital piece of that team, all-American quarterback Tanner Trosin — who passed for *See Game Day / Page 3C*

Patterson’s late score lifts Imbler to season-opening victory

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

It had been 15 years since the Imbler Panthers and Elgin Huskies last met on the football field in a high school varsity game.
The renewal of the rivalry Thursday night was worth the wait.
Imbler’s Ryan Patterson rushed for 197 yards and three touchdowns, including the go-ahead score with 1:44 left, teammate Grant Slater had three interceptions, and the Panthers held on for a 32-26 win at Community Stadium. It was the first matchup between the schools since a 38-6 win by Imbler in 2003 due to them alternating between 8-man and 11-man.
“That was a good one,” Imbler Head Coach Dustan Adams said. “Give Elgin a lot of credit. They’ve got a ton of talent, and they’ve got a lot more team speed than we do. We tried to just wear them down, (play) ball control as best as we could, and it eventually paid off in the fourth quarter.”
Imbler took advantage of a short field after Elgin turned the ball over on downs on its own 45 with 5:35 to play. The Panthers ran the ball on all eight plays on the ensuing drive, with Patterson capping it off with a one-yard plunge



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Imbler’s Wade McDonald pulls in a 29-yard touchdown pass during the first quarter of the Panthers’ 32-26 win over Elgin Thursday night, the teams’ first game since 2003.

to break a 26-26 tie.
“We know that we’re a big team up front, and there’s not a lot of people who are going to stop us, so (we were) going right up the middle,” Patterson, who carried the ball 32 times, said.
Elgin gave itself a final shot when Gage McKay returned the kickoff to the Imbler 37 before Wyatt Hallgarth reversed the field on a 12-yard run to get to the 25.
But two big plays, includ-

ing a sack by Imbler’s Aidan DeLint, backed Elgin up, and on fourth and 21, Tristan Simpson’s scramble for the first down marker came up short, allowing Imbler to run out the clock.
“It came down to turnovers and us shooting ourselves in the foot on different occasions,” Elgin Head Coach Jeff Rysdam said. “There were opportunities (where) we could have scored, but we had dropped balls, holding

penalties (or) fumbles. We’re going to be fine, (but) this was a hard one (to take).”
Imbler sprinted ahead out of the gate with a 50-yard scoring drive, an onside kick recovery and a 49-yard scoring drive in the first 6:50 of the contest. Patterson finished off the opening drive with a one-yard run, then quarterback Chance Goodman went over the top to Wade McDonald for a 29-yard touchdown pass and a

12-0 lead.
Elgin got on the board with a 29-yard scoring strike from Simpson to Ian Smith on the first play of the second quarter, then knotted the score up when Cody Harvey scampered left 14 yards for a 12-12 game with 6:03 to play in the half.
But a botched punt by the Huskies late in the half gave Imbler a short field, and the Panthers capitalized on a second Goodman-to-McDonald connection — this one of 21 yards — with just 15 seconds left to give the Panthers an 18-12 lead at the break.
After the teams traded turnovers to open the third, Elgin pulled even again on a 46-yard touchdown catch by Harvey. Patterson found the end zone from 10 yards out late in the third to again put Imbler ahead 26-18, but the see-saw affair swung again on Hallgarth’s 38-yard run to again tie the score with 9:27 left.
The turnover bug struck big time in the second half. The teams combined for seven giveaways — five after halftime. Slater was key in that, twice picking off Simpson in the fourth quarter — including right after an Imbler turnover — and collecting three picks on the night.
Slater credited the defen-

sive line for the interceptions, though.
“If those guys up front aren’t putting pressure on the QB, there’s no way I would be able to be there,” he said. “That’s a big part of it, probably the biggest.”
Patterson’s effort paced Imbler’s 248-yard night on the ground, which Adams said will be the key for the Panthers this fall.
“That’s where we have to be. We don’t have a ton of team speed, but we’ve got pretty good size up front, so we have to stay inside, in between our tight ends and just ground and pound,” Adams said.
Goodman finished 4-for-13 passing for 69 yards with the two TD strikes to McDonald and an interception. McDonald had 58 yards receiving.
Simpson led Elgin both through the air and on the ground. The junior was 9-for-19 for 147 yards and had two touchdowns and three interceptions. He also accounted for 95 of the Huskies’ 221 rushing yards.
“Tristan is the leader of this team,” Rysdam said. “He knows how to get in there and get those guys wound up and ready to play.”
Hallgarth added 59 yards rushing, and Smith had 57 *See Battle / Page 4C*