



Ronald Bond/The Observer

The Powder Valley volleyball team celebrates after the final point of its match Thursday in Imbler. The Badgers remained undefeated with a sweep of the Panthers.

## Badgers earn sweep

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

The Powder Valley Badgers volleyball team left Imbler Thursday evening the same way it entered: undefeated.

Behind scrappy play from their defense and a balanced offensive attack, the Badgers improved to 12-0 on the season with a straight set win over the Imbler Panthers, 25-21, 25-19, 25-21, in Old Oregon League action.

"We knew Imbler would be fundamentally sound, so we knew we needed to take care of our own stuff and not make a lot of mistakes. If we made mistakes, we knew they'd make us pay for them," Badgers Head Coach Marji Lind said. "We tried to play a super clean game, and for the most part we did."

Both teams put on a solid display on the defensive, showing an ability to get to tough kill attempts or tips.

The difference, though, was Powder's offensive attack and the balance when it had possession. Three players had at least five kills for Powder Valley, with Megan Bingham posting a match-high 10 kills. The senior also had 13 assists.

"I think what really sets our team apart in general is how we all contribute," Bingham said. "There's not just one powerhouse (player) we set the whole time or one specific person that is really good, but everybody on the floor can contribute a little. Tonight I don't think one person was necessarily killing it the whole time, but everyone was contributing."

The Badgers' offense was strong throughout, but seemed at its best early in the final set. Already with a two-set lead, Powder Valley used a 9-1 run to try to run away with the final set. Josi Kreiger had three of her six kills during the spurt, the last of which gave the Badgers a 9-1 lead.

"Offensively they've got a lot of weapons, a lot of girls who can hit the ball really well and play smart," Imbler Head Coach Jennifer Teeter said. "(They) were mixing shots up from tipping to hitting and finding holes in our defense."

But Imbler battled back to keep the third set close. The Panthers chipped away to within 15-10 on a kill by Erin Coston, and later went on a 5-0 run — capped by a Sydney Treat ace — to level the third set at 19-19.

"We were aggressive serving at times, which made a difference in us being able to stick with them score-wise," Teeter said.

The Badgers retook the lead for



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Imbler's Aspen Smith returns a ball during Thursday's match.

good and went up 23-20 on a tip kill by Brooke Allen, who had five on the night. Bingham later followed with a kill before Kreiger finished the match with her fourth ace.

Allen also reached double figures in assists with 10. Bailey Cole led the back line with 26 digs, while Allen and Maddie Carpenter had seven each.

"Our passers are phenomenal this year," Bingham said. "They definitely contribute to our team. Setters (and) hitters cannot take all the credit. Our liberos and our (defensive specialists) are super strong."

The teams went back and forth during a tight first set before Powder Valley gained some breathing room with a 10-3 run, which Kreiger finished with an ace for a 22-16 lead. Treat twice had a kill to get Imbler within three, but the Panthers got no closer.

Imbler used a 7-2 run to briefly take a 12-11 second-set lead on a pair of Powder Valley errors, but the Badgers responded with their own 7-1 run to take an 18-13 lead on a Kreiger kill. Imbler pulled within 19-17 before Kreiger had a kill and two straight aces to effectively ice the set.

Treat, Gracey Smith and Caysie McGinness each had four kills to lead the Imbler offense. McGinness also had two aces. Treat and Aspen Smith both led defensively with 14 digs, and both Chloe Birkmaier and Karrington Troyer had 13 digs. Troyer also had 13 assists.

The Badgers (13-0 overall, 2-0 OOL) host Pine Eagle today. Imbler

(7-5, 2-1) hosts Griswold Tuesday.

### Also BOBCATS SWEEP STANFIELD

Autumn Daggett had 20 kills and 10 aces, and the Union Bobcats opened Blue Mountain Conference action with a sweep of the Stanfield Tigers at home Thursday, 25-20, 25-23, 25-4.

The Bobcats opened the first two sets on runs of 9-0 and 8-0, then completely dominated in the third set to put the Tigers away.

"We are young and still have many areas we're looking to improve, but overall the girls are coming along well together," Union Head Coach Lasa Baxter said.

The Bobcats (7-2 overall, 1-0 BMC) travel to the Oktoberfest Tournament at Kennedy High School in Mt. Angel Saturday.

### JOSEPH TOPS COVE IN FOUR

Sabrina Albee had 16 kills, and the Joseph Eagles shook off a first-set loss to defeat the Cove Leopards in four sets, 23-25, 25-11, 25-14, 25-23, Thursday in Old Oregon League play in Joseph. "It took us a while to get in sync," Eagles' head coach Jill Hite said. "We just switched up our rotation last week. They worked well together with good communication in the third and fourth sets."

Emma Hite added 13 assists, eight digs and five kills, Camille Crenshaw had 18 digs and five aces and Madelyn Nelson had seven digs and four aces.

Stats were not available for Cove. The Eagles (10-5 overall, 3-0 OOL) host Enterprise today, while Cove (4-5, 1-2) travels to Adrian today.

## Shortage of sports officials has impact on local contests

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

La Grande's Pete Caldwell found himself in a predicament a week ago, and barring some major changes, he'll be faced with a similar situation in a week.

Caldwell is the commissioner of the Northeast Oregon Football Officials Association and an official himself, is responsible for delegating which officials go to which football games in Union and Wallowa counties, most of Baker County and part of Grant County.

Four games last weekend had to be rescheduled from their regular Friday kickoff times — two were moved to Thursday, one to an earlier time Friday and another to Saturday — in order for Caldwell to get coverage for all the area games.

With a roster of just 26 officials — and needing, at minimum, four for each contest — that same scenario may play out again next weekend with many area teams having home games. Some will likely move to Thursday or Saturday, while others will be moved to earlier in the day, meaning some of the officials will need to take two games a night.

"The 21st (of September) I have a potential of having three crews double (up)," he said.

Joel Hasse, of La Grande, an official for about two decades and the president of the NEOFOA, said at minimum the association would like to see 35 officials available for football in this area to help cover the 15 schools in the NEOFOA.

Given that a football game requires four officials, and five are needed for La Grande and Baker games, any Fridays with more than six games in a night require some schedule rearrangement.

### A BIGGER PROBLEM

The region — and, actually, the entire state — is seeing a continual shortage of sports officials, and the problem is played out on more than just the gridiron.

Island City's Dave Comfort, in fact, may have it worse than Caldwell when it comes to lining up referees for basketball. Comfort, the commissioner for Northeast Oregon basketball, baseball and softball, said he currently has only 37 officials — including himself — on the availability list for officiating basketball this winter. Between middle school, junior varsity girls and boys, and varsity girls and boys, there are roughly 900 games he has to find officials for during the winter. While it varies, most of the games are on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, with as many as four games at a single location. That could mean, in theory, 20-40 games a night, with two refs needed for each game, and, on occasion, three refs. He'd like to have about 60 officials on the roster.

As in Caldwell's situation, the shortage may mean redoing schedules. What's more, Comfort might be forced to cut games due to the lack of officials.

"At some point we may be down to being able to cover just the varsity sports," he said.

### THE REASONS

But why the shortage? A lot of the current officials are either reaching retirement age or already well into their golden years. Hasse said a football game last week had two officials in their 60s and two in their 70s, one of whom led the way at age 78.

On the basketball court, referees range from age 18 to 84, but the majority — as many as 55 to 60 percent — are 45 or older.

Caldwell, Comfort and Hasse each

said younger people are not stepping in when some of the older officials decide to hang up the whistle.

They all agreed it sometimes comes down to a person's availability — which is a challenge they face even with committed officials, be it due to work or someone being unavailable for personal reasons.

Caldwell believes that partially stems from the younger generation having an attitude of putting in only what is necessary for their 40-hour work week.

"I don't begrudge them. It's their time," he said. "They work hard. Go do what you want to do (afterwards)."

Being a sports official does take a time commitment, especially for those who are being called upon to cover doubleheaders for football this fall. A crew last week covered a 1 p.m. game in Baker and later a 7 p.m. game in Prairie City.

But the three said a big problem in filling their rosters also includes something current refs face each time they are on the field or court — getting hassled for calls, be it by fans, parents, coaches or players.

"I think part of it is they don't want to put up with the crap we put up with as officials," Hasse said.

Added Comfort, who himself has been an official for more than 30 years: "I think it's the overall scrutiny. Every call ends up being a thumbs up or down. If, over the course of the night you end up with 10 or 12 thumbs down and it's against little Joey, then little Joey's coach and/or parents are going to let you know."

Doug Henderson, of La Grande, has been an official since the early 2000s and is on the playing surface in all three sports seasons: football in the fall, wrestling in the winter and softball/baseball in the spring. He started as a way to stay involved in sports after his children graduated, and was part of the crew that worked the Baker-Prairie City football double dip last week.

He agreed, though, that sometimes officiating does become a challenge because of the scrutiny, and it's part of what keeps people from getting involved.

"A lot of times you turn around and a kid is harping because you didn't call this or that and you get tired of it," he said. "The younger generation can't take the criticism."

### BEYOND THE SCRUTINY

In spite of what an official may hear while on the field, there are perks to the job.

"I value it as a community effort," Henderson. "In our association, most of our officials have coached at one time or played the sport. We help the kids out."

He added at times, especially when officiating an Optimist game, he'll work with players to help them line up or get the proper stance, acting as sort of an additional coach on the field. He calls it "preventive officiating."

Working with the players is one of the benefits of the position, Hasse said.

"It can be very enjoyable," he said. "You get to see the game up close and personal. You see some fantastic athletes. Some of the fun stuff is the interaction."

Officiating can also be a way to make some money on the side. Depending on the classification level, sport and whether a game is varsity or junior varsity, an official can make anywhere from about \$40 to about \$68 per game, according to the Oregon School Activities Association's website. Mileage is also paid

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