

## Mounties aim for the stars

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

There are high expectations for the Eastern Oregon men's wrestling team as it enters its third season on the mat.

And by high, the Mountaineers are aiming for expectations not yet achieved in the program.

"I think we have five to six all-Americans in the room right now, and if that happens we're in the run for a (top four) trophy," EOU men's Head Coach Dustyn Azure said. "That's my goal this year."

The Mountaineers have about a 50-50 blend of returners and newcomers on the roster for the upcoming season. That list includes three of the four athletes who reached the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics national wrestling tournament last March and helped EOU to a 19th-place finish.

The three returning national wrestlers — Drake Randall, Blake McNall and Mhar Caballa — each fell just short of garnering all-American nods a year ago, with Randall and McNall finishing only one victory shy of the honor. Eric Fan, who claimed all-American status, graduated.

Randall, a senior, said he's using that shortcoming as an additional driving force for his senior campaign.

"Gotta figure it out this year," he said. "I'm going to, change my diet, eat healthy all the time, come in and work out more. It's my last year, so (I'm going to) push myself as hard as I can."

Azure said the trio is among the athletes he is looking to lead the team this season, and he said all are using the national tournament outcome as motivation.

"They definitely put the work in this summer all around. They put the work in in the weight room, in conditioning, (and) they came in in shape and ready to go," he said. "I'm excited to see good things out of them."

Azure is also looking to a newcomer, of sorts, among the team leaders — Dino May.

May, who served as an assistant coach the last two seasons, recently learned he still had eligibility from his wrestling days of a decade ago, when he was a junior college all-American at North Idaho College.

"Turned out I had two terms of eli-



Ronald Bond/The Observer

The Eastern Oregon men's wrestling team comes together for a break during practice Wednesday afternoon. Hopes are high for the Mountaineers, who believe they have five to six all-American prospects.

gibility, and I wanted to get an MBA for a while now," May said. "It was in the budget, so here I am — 30 years old, turning 31 in February, trying to scrap with these guys who are 10 years younger than me."

He said the biggest challenge isn't keeping up with the teenagers and 20-somethings on the mat. Rather, it's juggling a life of studying, working full-time and being a husband and father.

His ability to balance, however, is why Azure places him among the team leaders.

"That's what I mean by good leadership," Azure said of May's workload. "He's showing these younger athletes that it takes hard work if you want to go out there and achieve something. It's not going to be handed to you. You have to go out and earn it."

May is among about a dozen wrestlers added to the program from the recent recruiting class, a group Azure said will help the program continue to move in the right direction.

"We're getting the kids that have the mentality I'm looking for," the coach said. "They have expectations set for themselves high in the class-



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Drake Randall, left, is one of three returning Mountaineers who reached the national tournament a season ago.

room, on the mat and in the community. Going into our third season this year, I think we're going to see leaps and gains within the program."

McNall agreed the new wrestlers in the program will help take EOU to another level.

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## Eagles move to second round at state

Observer staff

The Joseph Eagles volleyball team is one win away from a return trip to the Class 1A state quarterfinals.

Emma Hite had 13 kills, Sabrina Albee added 11 and the Eagles took down the Echo Cougars in four sets, 20-25, 25-20, 25-5, 25-20, in the first round of the state playoffs Wednesday at Joseph.

Hite added eight assists, five digs and four aces for Joseph, while Albee had seven assists and eight digs. Camille Crenshaw recorded six kills and six aces, Natalie Gorham had eight assists and Madelyn Nelson had four kills.

The Eagles (23-8 overall) travel to Country Christian for a second-round matchup Saturday, with the winner advancing to the state tournament next week in Redmond. Country Christian, which enters at 19-9, has won the last four Class 1A state titles.

### COUGARS FALL JUST SHORT

Wallowa's first playoff volleyball appearance in five years was short-lived, as the Cougars dropped a five-set heartbreaker to the Adrian Antelopes in the first round of the Class 1A state playoffs in Adrian Wednesday, 25-23, 21-25, 20-25, 25-13, 15-12.

Stats were not available.

The Cougars' season comes to an end at 13-14 overall.

### BADGERS DRAW DAMASCUS CHRISTIAN

Powder Valley will put its undefeated season on the line when it hosts Damascus Christian in the second round of the Class 1A state playoffs Saturday. Damascus Christian advanced with a five-set win over Sherman Wednesday. The match is set for 7 p.m. in North Powder.

## EOU women have high hopes, more complete team in '18

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

Having a full team that can fill in all the weight classes has been one of the struggles in the early years of the Eastern Oregon women's wrestling program.

That issue looks to be mostly, if not entirely, resolved as the Mountaineers gear up for Year 3.

EOU has all nine wrestlers back from last season and has added five newcomers to the roster as the team prepares to kick off action this weekend in Montana.

"We're a pretty strong team," two-time all-American Jessica DeHart said of the squad. "We fill out weight classes pretty well this year. The last two years we've had gaps, so I think that we're coming in strong. We have a good freshmen class coming in as well."

A year ago, DeHart's second all-American nod and victories by four others helped lift EOU to a 15th-place finish at the Women's Collegiate Wrestling Association national tournament.

Amber Pair, who is the lone remaining original signee from the inception of the program, went 2-2 at nationals and believes there are several athletes on the team who could garner a top-eight spot and an all-American.

"I'd like to see at least four all-Americans, if not higher," Pair said. "As a group, I want to be in the top 10. I think it is (possible), especially



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Cassidy Freeman, left, and Amber Pair, shown in practice Wednesday morning, are among the nine returners for Eastern Oregon, which took 15th at nationals last season.

with the team this year."

EOU not only has five additions to add to the depth, but a change at head coach. Walt Anderson and Eric Jorgensen are stepping in to help the Mountaineers and lead the women's program this season after Ty Vinson returned to Montana.

Anderson has been, and will continue to be, an assistant coach with the La Grande wrestling program.

"I'm still doing the high school, and Eric and I are splitting time here with the women's freestyle team," he said.

Although Anderson didn't get

much of an opportunity to watch the team a year ago, he said he's noticed a difference in the program from the first year to now. The early stages of the season will be about gauging where the wrestlers are at, he added.

"Probably the first month I just

have to figure out what their skill level is on the mat, and we'll figure it out from there and build on that," he said. "They're here for a reason. They're all good wrestlers. We're not going to change anything. We're going to build on what they have, and they all have high skills."

Anderson said Macy Higa and Krystal Fabricante have been the standouts among the freshmen, an assessment Pair agreed with.

"Macy and Krystal have been a great asset to this team. They have pushed me personally at practice. They're tough, they're fun (and) they like to get after it," Pair said. "All (of the newcomers) are adapting pretty well. We like to push ourselves, like to push each other. We're all adapting as a team."

Higa, a freshman from Honolulu, Hawaii, also believes the team has the ability to make a splash at the national level this season.

"We're on track to do pretty well — or at least improve — from last year, since there are a lot who came in to add some depth to weight classes," she said. "I think we could be top-10 ranked. That would be my goal for the team."

That feat would have to come without the services of DeHart, who is redshirting this season due to injuries sustained in preseason practice.

DeHart believes, though, the team has the pieces to fill in her

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