

TIGERS

Continued from Page 6A that was too much for Marshfield to overcome. Presley Justice, who led the Tigers with 17 kills, had three kills in a four-point stretch for an 8-5 lead, and Seavert made it 13-6 with a kill. An ace by Mallory Heyer of Marshfield — one of 16 the Pirates had on the day — cut the margin to five, but Jaiden Hafer and Seavert finished the match with back-to-back kills to set off a deafening celebration.

“I thought it was unbelievable, how we were so down and we came back,” Justice, who also had 26 digs, said. “But I knew we could do it.”

Ending the four-year post-season home losing streak — which included first-round losses in 2014 and 2015, and play-in game losses the last two seasons — appeared to be a farfetched prospect after two sets. The Pirates never trailed in the opening set and then rallied from a 10-2 deficit in set two to take their commanding 2-0 lead. Alex Locati, who had 17 kills, and McKayla Myrand, who had 10 kills, both had six through what was a rough first two sets for a scrambling La Grande defense and serve-receive team. Marshfield had more than half its kills (22) and half its aces (nine) in the first two sets alone.

But Becker-Bisenius said she told her team to keep fighting. Her message? “They’re not going to let us win. You have to play with heart right now. You have to step it up. We have heart. — I (saw it in) you guys when we won the league championship,” she said.

Justice added: “We just said, ‘We’re still in it.’ It’s any-body’s game in volleyball.”

The Tigers used that spark on both offense and defense to take set three, leading it wire-to-wire behind five kills from Justice. Defensively, La Grande found a way to dig hits that had gone down for kills in the first two sets. The Tigers were also more effective at getting Marshfield out of system, which weakened the Pirates’ attack.

“Our practice this week helped a lot,” Felicity Houston, who had 29 digs to lead the back line, said. “Working together as a team, knowing we’re there for each other, knowing ‘If I don’t get this, you’ve got my back,’ or vice versa.”

Even Marshfield Head Coach Tammie Montiel said La Grande’s defense was a crucial part of its comeback.

“La Grande played scrappy,” she said. “They dug up a lot of hits in the third and fourth sets, and in the first couple of sets they were letting the ball get down. That always gets in the hitter’s head (when she thinks), ‘I just had my hardest shot and they dug it up — what do I do next?’”

Marshfield appeared to shake off the third and was in control much of the fourth set, leading 18-11 late on a kill by Heyer before La Grande rallied. The Tigers got within 19-16 on an ace by Justice and pulled even at 21-21 after a Seavert kill and an errant attack by Marshfield. The Pirates briefly retook the lead before La Grande scored the final four points to even the match.

“We started picking up their hard balls on defense (and) we started blocking a little bit better as the day went on, so it slowed them down. That kind of started to get in their head a little bit,” Becker-Bisenius said. “That helped give us that momentum. We’re scrappy, and we can dig a lot of (hits) that you don’t think are going to be dug.”

That fact was evidenced on the stat sheet, with the Tigers collecting 121 digs on the match. Along with Houston and Justice, Sea-

LOCAL SCHEDULE

**Tuesday
PREP BOYS SOCCER**

• North Marion at La Grande, Class 4A state playoffs, first round, Community Stadium, 5 p.m.

**Wednesday
PREP GIRLS SOCCER**

• North Marion at La Grande, Class 4A state playoffs, first round, Community Stadium, 1 p.m.

— Subject to change

vert, who also had 13 kills, helped key the back line with 28 digs. Jacie Howton and Kenzie Williams both added double-doubles, with Howton tallying 20 assists and 14 digs and Williams adding 16 assists and 11 digs.

“It was our hustle plays and our determination during that last game, just the hunger to win,” Houston said of her team’s comeback.

The effort in the rally fired up the LHS fan base, which Becker-Bisenius credited for giving the Tigers extra fuel. The crowd was particularly raucous in the latter stages of the fourth set, ratcheting up with each point in the final set and going into delirium on the winning kill.

“I’m so excited how many people came out to cheer our team on today. Our crowd was fantastic,” she said. “That helped us win big time. We had tons of people here and they were loud. We play well when our crowd is cheering.”

The Tigers (17-5 overall) will face Valley Catholic in the quarterfinals Friday at Forest Grove.

**ALSO
JOSEPH TOPS DEFENDING CHAMPIONS; BADGERS WIN AGAIN**

The Joseph Eagles reached the Class 1A quarterfinals for the second year in a row, topping four-time defending champion Country Christian in a five-set battle in the second round of the state playoffs Saturday afternoon, 25-21, 16-25, 25-21, 22-25, 18-16.

“So proud of the girls,” Joseph Head Coach Jill Hite said. “In the final set they won with sheer determination. What an amazing group of young ladies. (I’m) very honored to be their coach.”

Sabrina Albee led the Eagles with 12 kills and eight digs. Emma Hite had eight kills and four blocks, Madelyn Nelson tallied six kills and eight digs, and both Camille Crenshaw and Kana Oliver had nine digs.

The Powder Valley Badgers are also returning to the Class 1A quarterfinals after a two-year hiatus, sweeping Damascus Christian at home in the second round of the state playoffs Saturday, 26-24, 25-17, 25-21.

“The realization of their team goal to make it to the state tournament had come to fruition,” Head Coach Marji Lind said in describing the postgame celebration. “So excited for these girls, all 12 of them. They have worked so hard, put in so much time, pushed each other to improve and remained focused.”

The Badgers (31-0 overall) and Eagles (24-8) will square off in the quarterfinals of the 1A tournament Friday morning in Redmond. Powder Valley has won all four previous matchups this season.

UNION SWEEP OUT OF PLAYOFFS

The Union Bobcats volleyball team saw its season end in the first round of the Class 2A state playoffs with a road sweep at the hands of the Central Linn Cobras Saturday, 25-12, 25-19, 25-22.

Stats were not available. The Bobcats finish the season with an overall record of 13-11.



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Entries must be postmarked by midnight this Thursday or dropped off at The La Grande Observer by 4 p.m. this Friday. Late entries will be considered invalid.

Mail entries to: Football Contest, La Grande Observer, 1406 Fifth Street, La Grande OR 97850 or drop off at our office at the same address.

Limit 1 entry per person. Maximum of 2 entries per household per week. The contest is open to everyone in Union and Wallowa counties. No photocopies accepted. Employees of The Observer and their immediate families not eligible. Winners will be announced in Wednesday’s ad each week. Decisions of the judges are final.

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