

## EOU to take on national field

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

Although the stakes are high, Dustin Zimmerly isn't feeling pressured as the Eastern Oregon men's cross country team prepares for nationals.

That could stem from the Mountaineers not quite living up to their preseason No. 7 ranking, but as they get set to run the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics National Championship race Friday in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the junior is looking at how the team ran during the season as a good thing.

"The season hasn't gone quite as planned, but I'm kind of happy because going into nationals there's no pressure," he said. "Our attitude is let's see what we can do, how many people we can catch, and have fun doing it."

Zimmerly is one of three Mounties, along with Lane Inwards and Thomas Morrell III, who are making a return run at nationals hoping to get EOU back in the top 10 after the program took seventh a year ago.

"I know the team is going to give it their all and do their best for each other," said Zimmerly, who has been near the top of the pecking order for EOU all season.

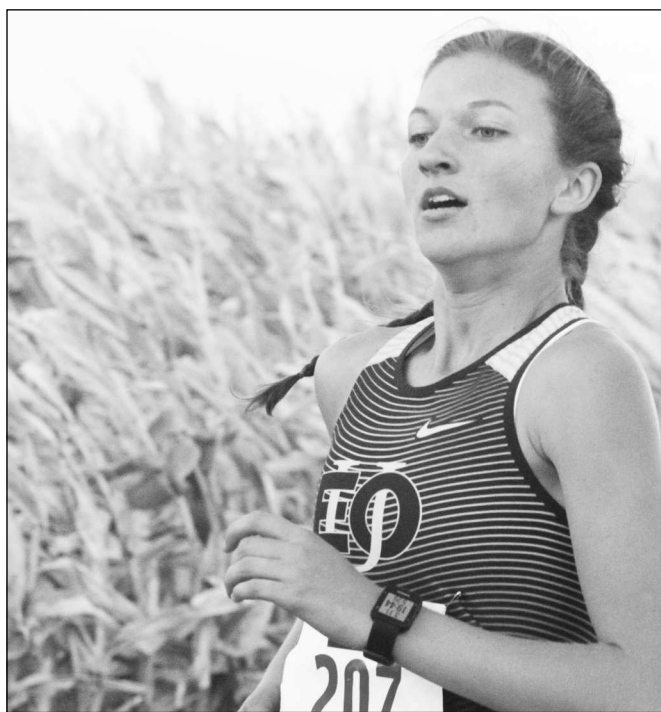
Inwards, who also said he doesn't view the season as a negative, believes the team is in position to make a run at the top 10 Friday — and maybe higher.

"It's been a good season, and something (Head Coach Ben Welch's) training has proved is that we come on late," he said. "We're all still really excited because we know we're going to show up at nationals."

Inwards noted some of Eastern's times have been good, pointing out the



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo  
Eastern Oregon's Thomas Morrell, left, and Lane Inwards are shown at the EOU Invitational in September. The Mountaineers will compete at the NAIA championships Friday.



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo  
Michelle Herbes is the first EOU freshman runner to qualify individually since McKenzie (Evans) Sheehy in 2014.

combined team time at the Bowles Invitational at Willamette University earlier

this season was faster than EOU's best time last season at the Inland Empire Col-

legiate Championships at Lewis-Clark State College — the Mountaineers' combined time at Willamette was 2:08:27, compared to 2:08:28 at LCSC.

That has Inwards hopeful Eastern could match its seventh-place finish and even contend for a trophy, which the team would earn if it places in the top four.

"I don't think it's unrealistic," the senior said. "To sneak out with a trophy would be cool."

To do that — or even be in the top 10, for that matter — will require Eastern getting consistent races from everybody making the trip, which has been a challenge at times this season.

"For the most part, they've been doing a great job," Welch said. "We just don't have the depth we were hoping for. A couple things didn't pan out the way we hoped. My young

guys have been doing a good job, they're just young."

Injuries and some bad luck in races have also limited the Mountaineers. Several runners were involved in crashes at the Cascade Collegiate Conference championships, and Morrell turned an ankle when he stepped in a hole. Welch also said Braxton Miller, who had been coming on strong, has been hampered since getting kicked in the Achilles tendon during a race.

Morrell could be the wild-card on Friday. While Welch said he doesn't want to put that much pressure on one team member, the junior was the top runner for Eastern at LCSC this fall and was second at Willamette. If he's in the mix for the Mountaineers' top spot, it could lift the team.

Welch also pointed out the course the runners will be on in Cedar Rapids — an all-grass surface — suits Morrell.

"Thomas has run well on the all-grass courses, (but) a couple of the other guys struggle more on them," the coach said.

Welch said the benefit of the relatively new course, though, is very few — if any — teams have experience on it.

"We're viewing it as a plus," he said. "Nobody has been on it to race this year, so nobody has an advantage in that respect."

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### LOCAL SCHEDULE

#### Friday COLLEGE CROSS COUNTRY

• Eastern Oregon at NAIA National Championships, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 11:30 a.m.

#### MEN'S AND WOMEN'S COLLEGE WRESTLING

• Umpqua Community College at Eastern Oregon, Quinn Coliseum, 5 p.m.

• Southern Oregon at Eastern Oregon, Quinn Coliseum, 7 p.m.

#### MEN'S COLLEGE BASKETBALL

• Eastern Oregon at Benedictine Mesa, Mesa, Arizona, 7 p.m.

#### Saturday PREP FOOTBALL

• Wallowa vs. St. Paul, Class 1A state semifinals, Hermiston, noon

#### WOMEN'S COLLEGE SOCCER

• Eastern Oregon at Grace College, NAIA National Championships opening round, Winona Lake, Indiana, 10 a.m.

#### MEN'S COLLEGE BASKETBALL

• Eastern Oregon at Arizona Christian, Phoenix, Arizona, 7 p.m.

#### Sunday COLLEGE WRESTLING

• Eastern Oregon at Spokane Open, Spokane, Washington, all day

— Subject to change

## Top four in CFP rankings unchanged

The Associated Press

The College Football Playoff rankings held steady at the top, with Alabama, Clemson, Notre Dame and Michigan an unchanged first four from last week.

The third rankings of the season were drama-free Tuesday night after every top-10 team won last weekend. In fact, the selection committee's entire top 10 stayed the same, the first time that has happened in the five seasons since the CFP was born.

With three weekends left until the final selections are made on Dec. 2, Georgia was fifth and Oklahoma was sixth. LSU, Washington State, West Virginia and Ohio State rounded out the top 10.

UCF moved up one spot to No. 11 and remained the highest-ranked team from outside the Power Five conferences. The Knights on Saturday play

Cincinnati, which is ranked for the first time by the selection committee this season at No. 24.

In the four-year history of the College Football Playoff, the four teams at the top of the rankings after three weeks have never all made it to the semifinals. As much as it might feel as if the field is well set, it would be best to expect an unexpected result or two over the next three weeks.

One upset that could create confusion for the selection committee would be if Alabama loses the SEC championship game to Georgia.


This could lead to the most controversial call in CFP history. The Crimson Tide is the defending national champion and Tua Tagovailoa and Co. have been stomping everyone in their path. The Tide is not losing this week to The Citadel. The chances are slim Auburn beats 'Bama at home. But

even if that were to happen, Alabama could quickly redeem itself by beating Georgia to

win the SEC on championship weekend. A 12-1 SEC

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