

EOU hosts tournament to honor former coach

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

The Eastern Oregon women's basketball team is bringing back an annual tournament as a way to honor a former coach.

The Coach Mike Memorial Tournament, which will honor former EOU Assistant Coach Mike Weissenfluh, will take place Saturday and Sunday. Eastern will play in an alumni game on Saturday evening before facing Lewis and Clark College Sunday. College of Idaho is also taking part and will face Lewis and Clark Saturday.

"I'm excited to be able to properly honor him. It's an opportunity for us to reflect on an incredible man who we were very blessed to have in our lives," EOU Head Coach Anji Weissenfluh said of her father, who was her longtime assistant coach before passing away unexpectedly in October 2016.

The event was originally set to be a four-team classic this year before a team dropped out, which promoted the move to add an alumni game and play just three games on the weekend.

Tiffanie Ulmer, who played for EOU from 2004 to 2008, is now an EOU assistant coach and coached alongside Anji and Mike, said the alumni game will provide a chance for former players to take the floor for Mike.

"I personally was glad one of the teams dropped out," said Ulmer, who will play in



Anji Weissenfluh photo

The Eastern Oregon women's basketball program is holding the first Coach Mike Memorial Tournament to commemorate the life of Mike Weissenfluh, left, the Mountaineers' longtime assistant coach who passed away in 2016.

the alumni game. "We're playing for him. It just happened to work out that our alumni can fill that spot."

Ulmer said a former teammate, Elise Hawes, who will be in the alumni game, conveyed the same feeling.

"She's got the same mindset," Ulmer said of Hawes.

Anji's hope is for the tournament to become an annual four-team classic. She believes it will help keep Mike's memory alive for new players coming into the program. Only two players on the current team — Maya Ah You-Dias and Andi Warn — have played a game with Mike on the bench, and Khadija Neumeyer and Jillian

Albright had barely joined the program when he died.

"Even though (future players) may not (have known) him, it gives an opportunity for them to understand the legacy he has left and how instrumental he was in our program," Anji said. "It gives us an opportunity to make sure he stays connected to our program. He meant a lot to it." Ah You-Dias expressed a similar feeling.

"I can't think of a better way to honor Coach Mike than by doing what he loved with the people he loved," she said. "Coach Mike really did touch all of our lives." It also allows for what the head coach called a more

natural avenue to talk about her father to new players.

"This tournament will help that. Even if it's for a weekend or just a game, they will be immersed in (the) memories."

There are several other ways new players learn about the former coach, be it through photos, stories from returning players or the decal of wings and a halo still up in the locker room that was posted shortly after his death.

One of the biggest ways, though, Anji and Ulmer are keeping Mike's presence in the program is by their approach to the game.

"It's just the way we do things. We want to do them a certain way," Anji

said. "That's how he taught me. That's what he and I believed in. That's how we built our program. I think our former student-athletes would expect me to be sure we do things that would always be respectful as well as a reflection of Coach Mike's attitude, work ethic and his values."

Ulmer, who added she recently was telling a new assistant coach in the department about Mike, said the tournament is "a good way to bring in those people who might not have known him."

EOU's alumni game is at 7 p.m. Saturday, and the Mountaineers face Lewis and Clark at 3 p.m. Sunday.

Eagles move to 3-0

Observer staff

Sabrina Albee scored a game-high 17 points, leading the Joseph Eagles girls basketball team to a 45-27 win over Umatilla Thursday at the Columbia River Clash.

Madelyn Nelson added nine points for Joseph, which built a 25-10 lead by halftime.

The Eagles (3-0 overall) play Griswold tonight.

EAGLE BOYS DROPTO 1-2

The Joseph boys basketball team scored just eight points in the first half of a 44-20 loss to Umatilla Thursday at the Columbia River Clash.

Tyler Homan led the Eagles, who were down 25-8 at the break, with seven points.

Joseph (1-2 overall) faces Griswold tonight.

COUGARS LOSE BY ONE

The Wallowa Cougars girls basketball team fell to the La Grande JV Wednesday, 33-32. Stats were not provided. The Cougars (1-3 overall) face Echo tonight at home.

BRIEFLY

Oregon Club Volleyball will be holding tryouts from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday at Baker High School. The tryouts are open to all girls from fifth to 12th grades throughout the region. Tryouts for 12U and 14U take place from 2 to 3:30 p.m. while 16U and 18U tryouts are from 3:30 to 5 p.m. For more information, contact Kaycie Kitzmiller at 541-519-6677 or Stephanie Churchfield at 541-518-9284.



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