

THE OBSERVER'S TOP 10 SPORTS STORIES OF THE YEAR

OUTLAWS

Continued from Page 8C second in 2016, first in 2017 and second this year.

"That's a pretty darn good run within that timespan," Moody said. "That's a pretty good tradition, and (we're) keeping it going."

The Outlaws had a pair of top 10 runners: fifth-place Ellyse Tingelstad (19:42) and 10th-place Kyla Hook (20:10).

—Ronald Bond

Tigers just miss out on repeat in state baseball

Two of the three victories by the La Grande Tigers baseball team in the lead-up to the Class 4A state championship game had come with the Tigers scoring the winning run in the late innings.

The Gladstone Gladiators returned the favor June 2 to prevent La Grande from repeating as state champions.

Gladstone's Matthew Lehrbach hit the go-ahead RBI single with two outs in the top of the seventh inning, then pitcher Ben McCoy shut down the Tigers' offense in the bottom of the seventh to lift the Gladiators to a 3-2 win over La Grande in the state title game at Volcanoes Stadium in Keizer.

"It didn't feel any different. It was the same thing with North Marion and Estacada," senior infielder Isaac Chamberlain said, referencing the Tigers' two 1-0 wins from earlier in the playoffs. "Good ball clubs playing good games. They were on their game today — they just had a couple more hits. They weren't going to stop (and) we never gave up. We were fighting until the very last pitch."

La Grande had just scored the tying run in the bottom of the sixth inning and was looking to keep the momentum on its side in the back-and-forth game. But Gladstone came up with the key plays it needed in the decisive inning.

Tyler Meyers walked with one out in the seventh against La Grande relief pitcher Parker Robinson, and Damian Alvarado reached on a fielder's choice and moved to second on an error on the play. Lehrbach followed by hitting the first pitch he saw into right field to score Alvarado for the lead.

The Tigers had one final chance in the seventh, but McCoy retired La Grande in order to secure the victory and the Gladiators' first baseball title.

Despite the outcome, there was a lot of pride in what the Tigers accomplished during the season.

"I'm just really proud of the guys," sophomore catcher Logan Paustian said. "It was a tough game. It came down to hitting, and they outit us. That was it. Both pitchers worked their (butts) off. I'm super proud of everyone."

—Ronald Bond

Badgers volleyball takes second place at state

The Class 1A state volleyball finals in Redmond came down to two unbeaten teams — the Powder Valley Badgers and St. Paul Buckaroos.



Sam Stephens photo

Powder Valley's Bailey Cole, right, returns a ball during the state tournament Nov. 2 in Redmond. The Badgers reached the state title match, where they lost to St. Paul.

And although it was the Badgers who were denied a second state title, Head

Coach Marji Lind was proud of her team's effort in one of the best seasons in program history.

"It's awesome to take second in state," Lind said. "It's a huge honor. The girls worked really hard for it and they're excited. Of course, you want to walk away with first, but not every team is going to be able to do that."

The Nov. 3 title match went to the Buckaroos in four sets, 25-16, 12-25, 25-6, 25-12, behind 21 kills from Isabelle Wyss and 19 by Erin Counts.

"They were tough. They're an excellent squad," Lind said. "They make very, very few mistakes."

The teams traded points much of the first set, one Lind called "lights out volleyball."

"It was outstanding volleyball to watch (no matter) which side you were for," she said.

A late 7-0 run, though, gave the set to the Buckaroos.

What followed was a second set Lind said was "magic." The Badgers put together a strong attack and an impenetrable defense to do something nobody in 1A had done all season — take a set from St. Paul. Powder Valley scored eight of the first nine points and never looked back.

"Everybody was firing on every single cylinder," Lind said. "It was like we couldn't do anything wrong. I don't know how many blocks (we had), but we just shut down their two big swingers. They could not get a ball across the net."

But everything turned against Powder Valley in the third, when the Buckaroos used a 17-0 run to take a 19-3 lead.

"The first two (sets) we played outstanding," senior Logan Nedrow said. "We were strong and confident. The third (set) we got in a lull and couldn't come out of it."

The Buckaroos' momentum carried into the fourth set, beginning with a 15-4 run that put St. Paul in control.

—Ronald Bond

EOU women's soccer makes deepest NAIA run

Arguably one of the best — if not the best — seasons in the history of the Eastern

Oregon women's soccer program came to an end Nov. 27.

Second-ranked William Carey, which entered play as the second-

most prolific scoring team in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, scored three goals in the second half to pull away from the No. 20 Mountaineers, 3-0, in Orange Beach, Alabama.

The Mountaineers, who were making their first-ever appearance in the NAIA's second round, hung with last year's national semifinalist through a tight first half that ended with the teams in a scoreless tie.

The second half, though, was all Crusaders.

Kelly Stubbington scored an unassisted goal in the 49th minute to give WCU the lead for good. Shantel Thompson and Silvia Leonessi — half of the Crusaders four players to reach double digit goals this season — scored in the 57th and 68th minutes, respectively, to put the game out of reach.

Just 10 days earlier the Mountaineers earned their first-ever NAIA playoff win when Taylor Boyer and Kaitlyn McLeod both scored in the first half of a 2-1 victory over Grace College Nov. 17.

Boyer wasted little time giving the visiting team the early edge, scoring in the fourth minute for a quick 1-0 lead. It was the first goal ever scored by the Mountaineers in the NAIA playoffs after the team was shutout 1-0 in both previous appearances in 2015 and 2017.

The margin held until McLeod gave the Mountaineers a 2-0 lead at the half by putting in a shot from the right side off an Alexandria Cuaresma pass in the 38th minute.

The Lancers got on the board with eight minutes to play on a Shelby Fort penalty kick but were unable to get the equalizer.

—Ronald Bond

EOU men's soccer turns in best season in program history

The Eastern Oregon men's soccer team turned in its best season in program history — one that saw the team match a program record for wins,



Ronald Bond/The Observer

La Grande's Lexee Gomes, left, and Valley Catholic's Josephine Clark make a play on the ball during a semifinal match Nov. 6 at Community Stadium. The Valiants ended La Grande's undefeated season with a 4-2 win.

post its best record ever and earn its first Cascade Col-

legiate Conference tournament berth and win. The season came to an end one victory short of an automatic berth to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics playoffs.

Rocky Mountain's Marco Kummerle scored a minute into the second half, and that was enough to give the Battlin' Bears a 1-0 victory over Eastern Oregon Nov. 8 in the semifinals of the CCC tournament in Springfield.

"We had some really good chances (but) we just couldn't find the back of the net," EOU Head Coach Zach Mills said. "They had one that went in. We just couldn't find that final touch. I thought we had better chances."

The Mountaineers and Bears played an even, scoreless match until Kummerle delivered the eventual game-winner to send RMC to nationals.

The Eastern Oregon men picked up their first CCC tournament victory in program history with a 2-0 win over Providence in the quarterfinals Nov. 7 in Springfield.

A quick scoring burst in a span of less than nine minutes was all the Mountaineers needed to secure the victory. Carlos Solorio made it 1-0 in the 26th minute when he converted on a 1-on-

1 opportunity, and Jack Rose scored on a strike off a corner kick in the 34th minute.

"I loved it. They came out and they had so much confidence," Mills said. "We knew we were going to win that game."

—Ronald Bond

LHS girls soccer reaches state semifinals

It had been five years since the La Grande girls soccer team reached the Class 4A state semifinals.

That changed on Nov. 3.

The Tigers rallied in the second half and Kara Gooderham hit a rocket from 34 yards away for the winning goal in the closing minutes, securing a 2-1 win over the Gladstone Gladiators at Community Stadium.

"Holy moly, that was amazing," Head Coach Kristen Rice said. "I'm so proud of them. They stuck to the game plan, they played hard the whole 80 minutes (and) they finished when we needed. I love it."

The Tigers' pressure mounted in the waning minutes of the second half, with La Grande seeing four shots either just miss or get stopped by Gladstone goalkeeper Aaliyah Asad in the final 20 minutes.

The fifth one finally broke through for the win. The Tigers worked the ball up top

to Gooderham, who had some space and fired off a missile into the top of the net. Asad got a hand on it, but the ball glanced off her hand and in.

"It was just awesome," Gooderham said of the shot. "It was a great feeling, and it's a great feeling to win, especially since we haven't made it past the quarterfinals in a long time."

It was the second thriller for the Tigers in four days following their Oct. 31 win via penalty kicks against North Marion.

"I knew it wasn't going to end up like last year," Lexee Gomes, who scored La Grande's first goal against North Marion, said. "We all told each other, 'We're not the same team as last year. We're going to win this one.' And we did it. I'm so proud of everybody."

The season did eventually end one game short of the state championship game with a 4-2 loss to Valley Catholic on Nov. 6.

A goal by Valley Catholic just 13 seconds into the match set the tone early, and a second-half comeback attempt by La Grande came up short.

Callie Kawaguchi had a hat trick that included the early quick strike, and the Valiants built a 3-0 lead.

Alaina Carson scored on a scrum in front of the net to finally get the Tigers on the board, and Audrey Garliltz added a goal in the closing minutes for the final margin.

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