Mounties have high hopes for nationals

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

Ronald Bond/Observer file photo

Eastern Oregon's Macy Higa, right, squares off with Warner Pacific's Trynadii Rocha during a dual in January. Higa and the Mountaineers begin competition at nationals Friday in Atlanta.

Before the season started, Eastern Oregon wrestler Amber Pair said she believed the women's wrestling team was capable of landing four all-Americans (top-eight finishers) and placing in the top 10 as a team at nationals.

As the Mountaineers prepare for that trip to the Women's Collegiate Wrestling Association championship tournament, which begins Friday in Atlanta, she still thinks that feat could happen.

"I can see at least three of us, hopefully four of us (getting) all-American," the junior said. "I want to be above 10 as a team. I feel like we're pretty tough, and we're ready to go get it."

Nine members of the team are set to make the trip to nationals, with a couple of injuries the only factor keeping that number in the single digits.

Injuries have been a storyline for EOU this season, as several of its duals have been shortened due to a lack of wrestlers. But the health outlook is mostly positive headed into Friday, according to Walt Anderson, women's co-head coach.

He is also optimistic about Eastern's shot at landing several all-Americans over the weekend based on the growth he's seen since the start of the season.

"Through the season with all the tournaments we've wrestled there's been a huge improvement," he said. "I'm new to the girls' circuit as far as nationals, so I don't really know what to expect as far as competition is concerned, but I know a lot of the tougher teams are in our conference, and we've wrestled a lot of the tougher teams. A lot of these girls have placed third, fourth or fifth (at tournaments), and we've had a couple in the finals."

His take, though, is that if wrestlers who have gone to nationals — like Pair — believe there are multiple all-Americans in EOU's wrestling room each day, then that is likely the case.

"Amber's got a lot of experience," he said. "She's been to the tournament before. She's been down that circuit. I think she knows what she's talking about."

Her teammates agree with her, as well.

Junior Cassidy Freeman was a win away from garnering all-American two years ago — as was Pair — and said being that close is serving as motivation entering this weekend.

"I feel like it's definitely a driving force," she said. "It's almost ironic that the person I wrestled in the blood round (where the winner earns all-American and the loser is eliminated) was my teammate (Jessica DeHart), but that just shows we've got a really solid team. If we hadn't been wrestling each other, we would have both been all-Americans.

"I'm definitely ready to bring it (again) this year."

In all, the Mountaineers have had two athletes named all-American in their first two trips to nationals, with DeHart winning the honor twice and Makayla Grimm claiming it in 2017.

Junior Lisa Megargee said at least half the team has the potential to bring home an all-American nod.

"And I think we could have more if people get their minds right," she said. "I think that's the biggest obstacle."

For Megargee, the mental aspect will be the key. She's missed a large portion of the season following knee surgery last year and is still working to recover. The junior has only gotten back into competition in recent weeks.

"It's kind of holding me back, in a sense, but I'm trying to get my mental part right," she said. "Physically I'm a little held back, but not too much."

Megargee, Renay Monohan and Sara Angelo are also making return trips to nationals — Angelo from two years ago and Megargee and Monohan from last year — while Macy Higa, Krystal Fabricante, Rosa Ramirez and Dempsi Talkington are all headed for the first time.

Higa and Talkington are probably the newcomers with the best shot at bringing home some hardware, according to Anderson, but he said everyone is capable of having a good weekend.

As for Pair, she believes the team has put in the needed effort and should be able to work through any lingering injuries to have a strong turnout.

"Nationals is tough. There are a lot of tough girls from all over the states, but I think our team is pretty tough, and we're ready to show who we are," she said.

Badger girls get 20th win

Observer staff

Megan Bingham scored a game-high 19 points, Autumn Davis added 16 and the Powder Valley Badgers girls basketball team earned its 20th win of the season, 58-21, on the road over the Pine Eagle Spartans Tuesday in Old Oregon League play.

The Badgers built a 27-10 at halftime then pulled away with a 23-4 run in the third quarter. Powder Valley (20-3 overall, 9-1 OOL) wraps up the regular season Friday at Elgin.

JOSEPH GIRLS ROLL PAST IMBLER

The Joseph Eagles girls basketball team clinched its 20th win with a 56-19 home win over the Imbler Panthers Tuesday night in Old Oregn League play.

Sabrina Albee led the way with 21 points, while Emma Hite and Madelyn Nelson both added 10 points.

Joseph (20-2 overall, 10-0 OOL) hosts Wallowa Friday, while Imbler (5-14, 3-7) host Cove Friday.

BADGER BOYS BOUNCE SPARTANS

Reece Dixon scored 15 points to lead four players in double figures as the Powder Valley Badgers boys basketball team earned a 58-35 road win over the Pine Eagle Spartans Tuesday in Old Oregon League play.

Roper Bingham added 12 points and both Dominick Grende and Moziss Nesser had 10 for Powder Valley, which outscored Pine Eagle in each quarter on the way to its 15th win. The Badgers (15-7 overall, 7-3 OOL) visit Elgin Friday.

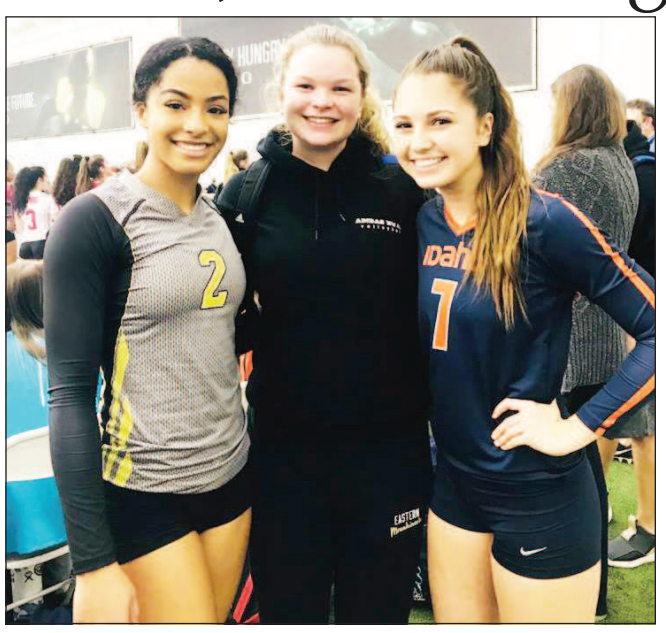
JOSEPH BOYS EDGE PANTHERS

The Joseph Eagles boys basketball team pulled away in the fourth quarter to earn a 37-30 Old Oregon League home win over the Imbler Panthers Tuesday.

The Eagles held a tenuous 24-23 lead after three quarters, but found enough in the final quarter to secure the win. Hadley Miller led the way for Joseph with nine points. Trey Wandschneider had eight. Grant Slater scored 16 points to pace Imbler, while Will Coston added eight points. Joseph (15-7 overall, 8-2 OOL) hosts Wallowa Friday, while Imbler (7-12, 4-6) hosts Cove Friday.

With 14 returners, Eastern Oregon volleyball adds three more

By Ronald Bond
The Observer



Holli Dodge photo

EOU 2019 volleyball signees, from left, Sade Williams, Brooke Dodge and Jessie White.

A year ago, Eastern Oregon volleyball Head Coach Kaki McLean-Morehead had to replace more than half her lineup, resulting in her signing nine new players for the 2018 season.

Assembling the 2019 class was much easier.

With 14 players returning, the EOU volleyball program added just three freshmen for the upcoming season: defensive specialist/libero Jessie White of Nampa, Idaho; outside hitter Sade Williams of Idaho Falls, Idaho; and setter Brooke Dodge of Sandy.

"I'm excited about the three of them," McLean-Morehead said. "Not only are they what we wanted in our recruits, but I think they'll be great fits for the university. They'll be great fits leadership-wise coming into our program and making an impact later on too."

All three players bring a high-level pedigree to the program as it looks to take the next step after reaching the round of 16 at nationals last fall.

Dodge is the reigning Mt. Hood Conference player of the year and was Class 6A 1st-team all-state after helping the Sandy Pioneers to a 24-6 record and sixth-place finish at the state tournament in November.

McLean-Morehead said Dodge reminds her of a recent EOU great.

"(She) resembles Rachelle (Chamberlain) in many different ways," the coach said, referencing the former record-setting EOU athlete who graduated following the 2016 season. "(For a setter) you always look for someone who has the leadership skills and the ability to be a little bit fiery, if you will. I think that she is that (piece). She definitely could come in and make an impact right away."

EOU lost one of its primary setters from a year ago, Sarah Carpenter, to graduation, but still returns Madison Pilon — who has led the team in assists the last two years with a combined total of 1,356 — and Abby Smith. Pilon has had a primary role in EOU's 6-2 rotation on offense, mainly alternating with Carpenter at setter, and McLean-Morehead believes Dodge will immediately be in the mix.

"We didn't want to miss on that (replacing a setter). We wanted to make sure (she) was a right fit for our program, and that she would come in and make a difference and add something different than the other two setters we do have. Brooke is going to do that."

The second signee, Williams, was a vital piece for a Bonneville Bees team that was runner-up in Idaho's Class 4A tournament and a first-team all-state competitor. Williams was also receiving offers to walk on at several Division I schools, including Idaho State.

"(She's) ridiculously athletic, jumps well (and with) the program she comes from, I think that she will come in and make an impact right away," McLean-Morehead said. "She naturally has a volleyball IQ. She's great defensively (and) has great big hands that make her able to contact the ball effectively. I think she very well could come in and be a missing piece for us."

At 5-foot-8, Williams will be the shortest front-line player on the team. But she more than makes up for her lack of height with her other intangibles, the coach said.

"Size matters, for sure, but there's value in athletic ability, and there's also value in reading the game. Sade has both," McLean-Morehead said.

White rounds out the recruits as a back-line player from Ridgevue High School who was named 4A all-state honorable mention. McLean-Morehead expects White to come in and play under and learn from Kiley McMurtrey, the reigning co-libero of the year in the Cascade Collegiate Conference who is returning for another season. That said, White will also see a lot of floor time.

"She is a great fit for Eastern Oregon, but also plays with passion and heart. I think that's something that will add to our program," McLean-Morehead said.

White also has ample experience playing for the Idaho Crush, a club volleyball

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