

## Tigers make return to the podium



Amanda Welch photos

The La Grande girls swim team, led by Romayne Ricker, left, took third, while Garren Dutto, right, had two individual titles to lead the boys team to a third-place finish.

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

Garren Dutto put a nice finishing touch on his swimming career and helped get the La Grande Tigers boys team back on the podium.

The LHS senior won two individual state titles and swam legs on two top-three relay teams to lift the Tigers to a third-place finish at the Class 4A/3A/2A/1A state meet Friday and Saturday at Tualatin Hills Aquatic Center in Beaverton.

"To me it was just a fitting finish for him," Darren Dutto, LHS head coach and Garren's father, said. "To have him go out on top, have some good swims and dominate the field was a testament to him. It was great feeling."

Garren Dutto came away with the top spot in the boys 50-yard freestyle (21.73 seconds) and repeated as champion in the 100 freestyle with a time of 47.63 seconds.

It's the second year in a row Dutto has claimed two individual titles. In addition to winning the 100 freestyle a year ago, he also won the 100 backstroke. The victories give him

five individual championships — seven total, as he was also part of two winning relays in his career.

"I don't think there really was a better way that could have gone," he said. "I had great swims (and) the team placed really well."

Dutto also swam the third leg of the 200 medley relay, as he, T.J. Clay, Grayson Jensen and Caden Ricker placed second with a time of 1:44.42. The same group later took third in the 200 freestyle relay with a time of 1:34.20.

Darren Dutto said when he saw the way the relay teams performed in the preliminaries on Friday, he felt good about the team's chances to place.

"(After) those performances, I had a lot of confidence going into Saturday that we were going to be in the mix," he said.

One additional individual reached the finals and placed for the Tigers, as Clay finished in sixth place in the 100 backstroke with a time of 59.21 seconds.

It all added up to 33 points and a third-place trophy for La Grande, which a year ago took

fifth and missed taking home a trophy. Newport was the runaway state champion with 90 points, while Marshfield was second with 46 points.

Newport's dominance, in fact, may have aided in La Grande getting third.

"I wasn't sure how we were going to do. It depended on the other teams," Garren Dutto said. "Basically Newport stole all the points and it left room for other teams like us (who didn't have many athletes there)."

The La Grande girls also returned to the podium, nearly duplicating the effort of the boys team with 32 points and a third-place finish. The LHS girls placed sixth a year ago.

"I never really thought about (where we would place)," junior Romayne Ricker said. "Dutto said he thought we could. It was great to get back on the podium."

Sweet Home was the team champion with 69 points. Catlin Gabel was second with 50.

"The girls team put together a solid all-around effort. That was the key," Darren Dutto said.

Three second-place finishes — one of which was a tie for second place — boosted La Grande. The Tigers opened the finals Saturday with Aryana Bouten, Ricker, Kristal Jensen and Reagan Kruse tying with Tillamook for second in the 200 medley relay in a time of 1:55.02.

Later, the 200 freestyle relay team of Romayne and Laramie Ricker, Kruse and Jensen placed second (1:43.81). Individually, the Tigers got a second-place showing from Romayne Ricker in the 200 individual medley (2:10.25). The junior also placed fourth in the 100 breaststroke (1:08.61).

Jensen, in addition to her role on the relay teams, finished third in the 100 butterfly (1:00.13). Kennedy Kruse rounded out the placers for the LHS girls, taking sixth in the 500 freestyle in a time of 5:34.54, 14 seconds faster than her time at the district meet.

"That was probably the swim of the meet for me. That (effort) inspires all the kids," he said.

He called the overall performance "a great weekend," and added, "The kids swam so well." ■

## Powder Valley upends Eagles

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

The Powder Valley Badgers girls basketball team was eaten up by the Joseph Eagles' press in their loss a month ago.

Saturday, the Badgers figured out the puzzle and locked up their first Old Oregon League tournament title in seven years, upending the Eagles, 43-37, at the district tournament title game in Baker City.

"We hadn't faced a good press before (the first game against Joseph)," Powder Valley Head Coach Allen Bingham said. "We had to go to work and figure out how to do better, and we were ready for that today."

The Badgers withstood a fast start from the Eagles — who went up 17-9 early in the second quarter on a Sabrina Albee 3-pointer — and went into the half leading 24-23 when Logan Nedrow beat the second-quarter buzzer with a trey.

Powder Valley never surrendered the lead, going ahead 31-26 on a Megan Bingham basket late in the third and by as much as six early in the fourth quarter.

Joseph pulled within 36-34 on two Emma Hite free throws with 3:37 to play, and had a shot for the lead a minute later, but Hite's 3-pointer rimmed out.

The key sequence happened with about a minute to play and the Badgers up by three. Albee corralled a steal for Joseph, but Nedrow stole the ball right back and found an open Autumn Davis for a jumper and a 39-34 lead. Belle Blair added two free throws moments later for a seven-point margin.



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Megan Bingham, left, and Autumn Davis celebrate after Powder Valley's win over Joseph Saturday.

Albee hit a 3-pointer with 20 seconds to go to keep the game close, but the Badgers held on.

"It feels really good," Blair, who had nine points and seven rebounds, said of the win. "I felt like a lot of people didn't feel like we would (beat Joseph), but we did. We just showed people we belong (with) the top teams."

Davis finished with 10 points, and both Josi Krieger and Bingham scored seven points. Krieger also grabbed 11 rebounds to help boost the Badgers to a 40-22 margin on the glass, and Nedrow added four steals.

"We rebounded the ball really well," Allen Bingham said. "They didn't get a lot of extra shots. For us to have a shot at a team like Joseph, we have to do all those extra things, and today we did."

The Badgers also held Joseph to just 30 percent shooting and to its second-lowest

point total of the season.

Albee scored 12 points to lead Joseph, while both Hite and Madelyn Nelson scored nine points. Nelson also had four steals.

The win boosts Powder Valley (23-3 overall) into a second-round home game Saturday against an opponent to be determined, while the Eagles (23-3) host Ione in a first-round game Wednesday.

### Friday POWDER VALLEY 50, WALLOWA 24

Megan Bingham led the way with 25 points as the Powder Valley Badgers girls basketball team pulled away in the second and third quarters for a 50-24 win over the Wallowa Cougars Friday in the Old Oregon League semifinals in Baker City.

The Badgers used a 34-7 run spanning the middle quarters to turn an 8-6 edge into a 42-13 margin after three.

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## Tigers forced to wait and see

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

A last-second basket in regulation gave the McLoughlin Pioneers basketball team the momentum it needed to win in overtime, make history and put the La Grande Tigers' postseason hopes on life support.

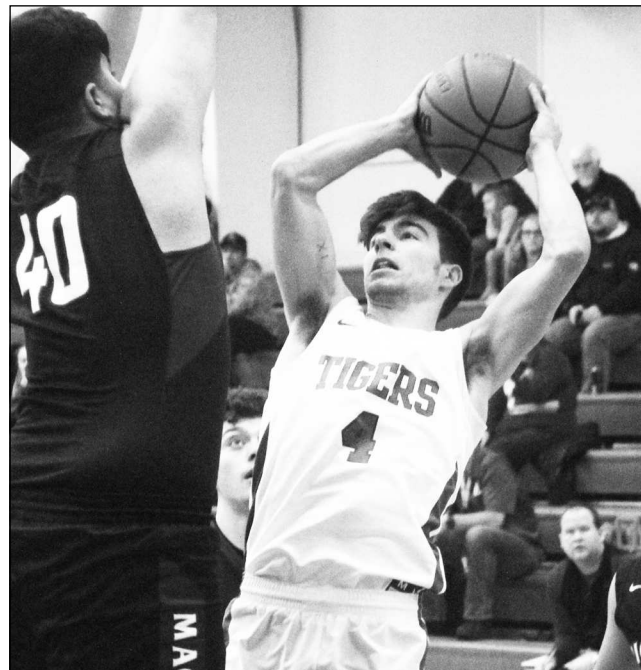
Zach Hodgen beat the buzzer with a putback to force overtime and Alexis Pio and Dareagan Stephens hits 3-pointers early in the extra session to give the Pioneers a lead they would not relinquish as they defeated La Grande, 66-62, in the Greater Oregon League semifinals Friday night in La Grande.

"I don't want to take anything away from Mac-Hi. They played a good game," La Grande Head Coach Mark Carollo said. "Their effort was on point tonight. It took us a whole half to match what they were bringing to the table."

With the win the Pioneers, who are typically at or near the bottom of the GOL standings, clinched their first state playoff berth since 1995. La Grande, meanwhile, is left waiting to see if it will finish with a high enough OSAA ranking to possibly snag a bid to a play-in game.

Mac-Hi led most of the night, and went up as much as 44-29 when Hodgen, who led the Pioneers with 15 points, hit a 3-pointer early in the third.

La Grande, though, finally found an offensive rhythm to get into the game and eventually take the lead. Nick Tsiatsos, who scored 20 points to pace the Tigers, hit two of his six 3-pointers in the third, the last one beating the buzzer, to pull La Grande within



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Nick Tsiatsos led La Grande with 20 points in Friday's loss to McLoughlin.

46-39 after three quarters.

The senior connected twice more in the fourth, with the second trey of the period tying the score at 53-53 with four minutes to play. A basket by Kaden Chandler a minute later put the Tigers up 55-54.

A free throw by Hunter Youngblood with 12.5 seconds to play gave the Tigers 56-54 lead, but on the final play of regulation Hodgen rebounded an errant 3-point attempt by Armando Ruiz and banked home the follow-up to tie the score and steal the momentum.

The 3-pointers in overtime by Pio and Stephens put the Pioneers up by six, but some iffy free-throw shooting as Mac-Hi missed the front end of three 1-and-1 scenarios in the final minute kept the Tigers alive. Kaleb Myer pulled La Grande within 64-62 with a 3-pointer with 11 seconds to go, but Pio — who had

missed two of those key free throws earlier — knocked home two with 8.9 seconds to play to seal the win and set off a Pioneers' celebration 24 years in the making.

Justin Jenner added 10 points and Youngblood scored eight for La Grande, which shot just 22-for-64 overall. Mac-Hi, meanwhile, was 21-for-48, and 9-for-21 from 3-point range. Most of those 3-pointers came in the first half, when Mac-Hi was 6-for-10 from deep, including 4-for-5 in the first, to take as much as a 14-point lead and a 37-28 advantage at the half.

"You gotta give credit to Mac-Hi," Carollo said. "They came in on the road and right from the beginning kind of stuck it to us. We didn't come out with the same fight and energy, and so we were playing from behind the entire game."

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