



Ron Osterloh photo

Steven Beckman, of Joseph, a three-time Class 2A/1A state champion, will continue his wrestling career at Treasure Valley Community College.

Hard work pays off for Joseph's Beckman

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

Most athletes put in the work required of them during practice.

Others raise the bar, finding additional time to hone their skills to take them to the top tier of their sport.

Joseph senior Steven Beckman falls into the latter category. His work beyond the practice room played a large role in him becoming a three-time state champion and two-time high school all-American wrestler.

He'll be counting on that same work ethic to propel him at the next level, as he signed Thursday to continue his wrestling career at Treasure Valley Community College.

"A lot of kids will go to practice and work their butt off there," he said. "I'm not afraid to put in extra time," noting he found success in putting the additional hours in.

Beckman said during wrestling season he would typically work out in the morning, during his lunch break at school and after practice. He did additional cardio and weight work to go along with the practice sessions.

"It didn't matter when it was, I was working," he said.

Currently, he works out twice a day as he prepares for the college level.

His work ethic was really shaped after a freshman year that he said "didn't

turn out the way it should have. I didn't feel practice was enough."

That's not to say he wasn't coached well, as he said Joseph Head Coach Tim Kiesecker "taught me more than most coaches. (But) where I was at was not close enough to where I wanted to be."

The results since that freshman campaign speak for themselves.

He joined rarefied air in winning three consecutive 2A/1A state championships for Joseph, taking the 106-pound title as a sophomore and junior and winning the 113-pound bracket as a senior.

And he didn't just win at state. He dominated. Seven of his nine state tournament matches during that three-year span he won via pinfall.

He's also excelled at the national level, winning second place in freestyle wrestling and third in folkstyle during the USA National Tournament last summer to reach all-American status.

That tournament, in fact, revealed an aspect of the sport he wants to develop in college. While Beckman listed quickness, strength and confidence among his assets moving to the next level, he noticed when wrestling at nationals a year ago that upper-echelon wrestlers were better at defending their opponent's shot, or takedown attempt.

"My shots worked pretty

well in high school, but last year when I went to the national tournament it was different," he said.

Beckman was considering several other options, including Eastern Oregon, Corban and a handful of East Coast schools. Part of the decision to go with TVCC was the flexibility he'll have for his summer job.

"I'm going to be fighting fire this summer and didn't want to go to a college that required me to come back in the summer," he said, noting that TVCC training doesn't start until October.

He also said spending time at TVCC, which will wrestle in events that feature a wide range of athletes — including Division II and Division III — will enable him to get a taste of college wrestling and see how he stacks up before deciding on a four-year school.

And anyone concerned about his size at college — given he wrestled mainly at 106 and 113 and the lowest weight class at college is 125 — can rest assured. He said he's already bulked up to around 140 pounds.

"I'm going to have to cut weight, which is something I wouldn't (have) expected," he said.

Beckman takes pride in being from a small school and finding ample success in a sport that's been a part of his life since age 4 or 5, when he started wrestling

See **Beckman** / Page 8A

Blazers draw Westbrook, OKC for first round of NBA playoffs

By Anne M. Peterson
The Associated Press

PORTLAND — For the second straight season the Portland Trail Blazers earned the third seed in the West and home-court for the playoffs. This year they're looking for a better outcome than last year when they were surprisingly swept in the opening round by New Orleans.

It won't be easy.

The Trail Blazers take on Oklahoma City, a team that swept Portland in their four regular-season meetings.

"Being a top three team in the West is quite an accomplishment. It shows that our work has paid off — especially after last season to be able to bounce back and do it again — to me that's proving it up," Damian Lillard said. "That's showing a certain amount of grit and desire to get back to this point."

"We should be proud of ourselves, but obviously our business is just beginning."

Portland locked the No. 3 seed with a wild 136-131 win over the Sacramento Kings in the regular-season finale on Wednesday night. Rookie Anfernee Simons, just 19, had 37 points in his first career start and the Blazers used just six players.

On the surface it appeared the Blazers (53-29) were trying to sink the final game to get the No. 4 seed and a first-round matchup with the Utah Jazz. But

the Denver Nuggets rallied to beat Minnesota and nail down the second seed, and Portland overcame a 28-point deficit against the Kings to win.

Though Oklahoma City swept Portland, all of the Blazers losses were by single digit margins.

"You know every game that we played against them has been a close game. We lost all four against them last season, but last season we beat them all four games," Lillard said. "So we know that we're capable of beating them. Each game this season came down to a possession here, a possession there. It's going to be a tough, tough series."

"We've got to go out and just be aggressive going into it."

Following a rough-and-tumble 129-121 overtime loss in Portland on March 7, center Jusuf Nurkic said he'd be "the happiest man on the earth" to face Thunder in the playoffs.

But the Blazers will have to go it without their dominating 7-foot big man, who broke his left leg after crashing awkwardly in an overtime victory at home over the Brooklyn Nets on March 25.

Nurkic was averaging 15.6 points and 10.4 rebounds a game this season.

The Blazers have since relied on Enes Kanter, who was waived by the New

See **Blazers** / Page 8A

Koepka, DeChambeau early leaders at Augusta National

By Doug Ferguson
The Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Georgia — Bryson DeChambeau believes science was at work late in the afternoon at Augusta National, creating a force in the atmosphere where big roars from great shots filter through the back nine.

Another exciting finish at the Masters, this time on a Thursday.

Brooks Koepka got it started, adding to his reputation of playing his best golf in the majors. He rolled in a 20-foot putt birdie from behind the 12th green, the first of four straight birdies to take the lead. DeChambeau answered with four straight birdies at the end of his round, with two

shots inches away from being even better.

His 8-iron on the par-3 16th grazed the edge of the cup. His 6-iron into the 18th was even better, so good that it rolled smack into the middle of the pin and bounced back an inch or two.

Both wound up in a share of the lead at 6-under 66.

"Absolutely, there is an energy and there is something in science that does talk about that," said DeChambeau, who has a scientific answer for everything. "It's great to have momentum and great atmosphere and gets you all pumped up, creates adrenaline flow. ... I believe that's partially what happened today."

They were one shot ahead of 48-year-old Phil

Mickelson, who delivered thrills of his own.

Mickelson found some momentum after shots in the pine trees at No. 10 and in the water on No. 11, both leading to bogey when he thought it could have been worse. He answered with three birdies on the next four holes, including a shot into the 16th that stopped inches from the cup.

He had a 67, his best start since 2010, when he won his third green jacket.

"It looked like, after bogeying 10 and 11, that would kill some momentum. It was the other way around, because I made two great bogeys that should have and could have been doubles,"

See **Masters** / Page 8A

SPORTS BRIEFS

Mountaineers softball to play in Pasco this weekend

The Eastern Oregon University softball team moved this weekend's Cascade Collegiate Conference series against Providence, Montana, from La Grande to Pasco, Washington, due to inclement weather and field conditions at Peggy Anderson Field.

It's the second home series this season that EOU has been forced to

move due to weather, and will leave the Mountaineers with just one final home series, which will be played April 26 and 27 against Oregon Tech.

The Mountaineers enter the series four games back of Carroll College for the final spot into the CCC tournament with nine conference games to play.

Golf tournaments canceled, rescheduled

The Heppner Invi-

tational, which the La Grande, Wallowa/Joseph and Enterprise girls was scheduled to play in Thursday, was canceled due to weather conditions.

Enterprise and Wallowa/Joseph were slated to be back on the course today at Umatilla.

La Grande's home girls invitational, which was postponed earlier this week due to weather, has been rescheduled for 1 p.m. Tuesday.

CHECK OUT THE
Local Sports Report...

THE OBSERVER



Tune into the Johnny Ballgame Show for the Local Sports Report with Observer Sports Editor Ronald Bond at 5:30 p.m. each Wednesday.

ON THE
Johnny Ballgame Show



Listen to the Johnny Ballgame Show from 3-6 p.m. Monday through Friday on SuperTalk 1450 AM.

