

Tigers' softball family set for rematch against Henley in championship game

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

The La Grande Tigers softball team will face a team for the state championship Saturday afternoon that, in many ways, resembles itself.

Both the Tigers and their opponents, the Henley Hornets, enter the title game at Jane Sanders Stadium in Eugene with great pitching, brilliant offense, solid defense and smart coaching.

So what could be the X factor for La Grande in the game against Henley?

Team chemistry. "They refer to each other as sisters and family, and I think that's a big difference," head coach Woody Wright said during the team's practice Thursday.

This will be the third straight year the Tigers and Hornets have met, and the second time in a row they have squared off for the championship. Two years ago, Henley scored late for a 1-0 win in the semifinals on its way to a state title. A year later, La Grande won its first championship, 6-1, over Henley in the final game.

"I think (the excitement is) even higher because it's Henley again," senior Alaina Carson said. "They beat us sophomore year, we beat them junior year. It's time to get them again to prove who is the best."

While there is that "tiebreaker" or aspect of the upcoming game, junior Jayce Seavert said more of the focus has been on the task at hand and not worrying about who the opponent is.

"The main thing we talk about is (Henley's) going to want to win," she said. "We need to hold our composure, and we can't freak out. It's just another team."

Henley enters as the top-offensive team in 4A and one of the best in the state. The Hornets' 407 runs scored is second only to 2A/1A Central Linn for most at any classification, and they average 13.57 runs in their 30 contested games. One win for the 29-2 Hornets came via forfeit.

"They've got two good power hitters, have the ability to drive it deep (and) they are very well disciplined at the plate. They are not going to chase (pitches)," Wright said of Henley. "They (also) have a lefty in the lineup who is decent. They're solid 1-6, (but) 7, 8, 9, if you overlook them, can put the ball in



The La Grande softball team is shown after winning the state semifinal over Junction City Tuesday. The Tigers face Henley in the state championship game for the second year in a row on Saturday.

Ronald Bond/The Observer



La Grande catcher Jayce Seavert, left, high-fives LHS head coach Woody Wright rounding third base after her third home run during Tuesday's win.

Ronald Bond/The Observer

play as well."

One other area in which the Hornets and Tigers (23-1) are similar is dominance of 4A opponents. Both are undefeated within the classification this season. Henley's only losses are to 6A Grants Pass and 5A Crater, and La Grande's lone loss is to 5A Pendleton. They also share wins over Junction City,

Banks, Mazama and Philomath/Alsea.

Wright believes La Grande's edge is that each of the players in the Tigers' offense, which itself is averaging 11.29 runs per game, can produce, as has been the case all season. The team also has, statistically, the best pitching staff in 4A and second-best in the whole state,

with only 2A/1A North Douglas (34 runs) allowing fewer than La Grande's 35 runs allowed this spring.

But Wright again pointed to the close-knit nature of the team as what he predicts will be a key for the Tigers to come away with a win.

"We're a complete team. Offense.

If you go:

What: Class 4A softball state championship game

Who: La Grande vs. Henley

When: 5 p.m. Saturday

Where: Jane Sanders Stadium, Eugene

What's at stake: A win by La Grande would give it a second straight title, and make it the fourth 4A program this decade to repeat. A win by Henley would be its second title in three years.

Defense. (We're a) softball family. The girls have each other's back all the way around. Something that has kept us together and carried us through some close games is how close these girls are," he said.

It's a point senior Lexee Gomes agreed on.

"Everyone gets along so well. It comes outside of (just playing) softball together. We could go anywhere together and it would be fun," she said. "It's more than just the game for sure. You have to have that chemistry."

"Our mentality is we show up, we have a good time, and we play softball," Carson added. "We laugh, we travel. Winning is great and all, but it's great to be with all the girls

See **Tigers** / Page 8A

Raptors take Game 1 of finals

The Associated Press

Pascal Siakam scored a playoff career-high 32 points and the Toronto Raptors won the first NBA Finals game played outside the U.S., beating the Golden State Warriors 118-109 on Thursday night.

The Raptors hardly looked like newcomers to the NBA's biggest stage, controlling

the action most of the way against a Golden State team beginning its fifth straight NBA Finals appearance.

Kawhi Leonard added 23 points and Marc Gasol had 20 for the Raptors.

Stephen Curry scored 34 points and Klay Thompson had 21 for the Warriors, who had won all four Game 1s in the last four years. All those

had come at home, but this time Golden State doesn't have home-court — or home country — advantage.

Game 2 is Sunday night in Toronto, which is hosting an NBA Finals game for the first time after the Raptors entered the league as an expansion team in 1995.

The Raptors were perhaps a

See **NBA Finals** / Page 8A

Blues win in OT to pull even

The Associated Press

BOSTON — Carl Gunnarsson scored on a delayed penalty 3:51 into overtime, Jordan Binnington made 21 saves and the St. Louis Blues beat the Boston Bruins 3-2 on Wednesday night to tie the Stanley Cup Final at a game apiece.

Robert Bortuzzo and Vladimir Tarasenko also

scored to help St. Louis win a Cup finals game for the first time in 14 tries in franchise history. It was the first overtime in a Cup final since Game 2 of 2016.

Charlie Coyle and Joakim Nordstrom scored for Boston and Tuukka Rask made 33 saves. The Bruins won 4-2 in Game 1 on Monday night and had won eight

straight games.

Game 3 is Saturday night in St. Louis.

Gunnarsson also hit the post behind Rask with about 2 minutes left in regulation. In the final minute, Boston's David Pastrnak had a chance off a faceoff, but Binnington turned it away.

"Would have loved to

See **NHL Finals** / Page 8A

CHECK OUT THE Local Sports Report...

ON THE Johnny Ballgame Show

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.

Twitter @lgoBond



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



Twitter @JBG_Show