



Observer file photo



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo

Nicole Christian is shown during her junior season at Eastern Oregon in 1999. The two-time all-American shortstop was named the new head coach of the EOU softball team Tuesday.

Christian is shown coaching for McLoughlin during a game against La Grande this spring. Christian led the Pioneers to two state titles.

Ayala named Eastern women's wrestling coach

Observer staff

Michael Ayala has spent the last two seasons coaching with the University of Providence wrestling team in Great Falls, Montana. He will take over as the head coach of the Eastern Oregon University wrestling program, the school announced Monday.

"Through the interview process, it was clear to see that not only will Michael's ties to the Pacific Northwest be beneficial to him leading our program, but Michael is dedicated and excited to be part of growing the sport of women's wrestling," EOU Athletic Director Anji Weissenfluh said in a press release. "His ability to connect with student-athletes and to identify quality prospects are some of (the qualities) we believe will help him find success at EOU."

Ayala has coached with both the Argos' men's and women's programs in various roles the last two seasons, most recently as

an assistant coach to both programs. According to the press release, Ayala is a USA Wrestling Bronze certified coach and has ample experience in freestyle wrestling, the format used in women's collegiate wrestling.

"I'm very honored to coach a group of hardworking women," Ayala said in the press release. "I really like the team chemistry and (that) every athlete here wants to get better. I'm excited to get to help these student-athletes reach their goals on and off the mat. We want to be competitive and excel at all levels, and we strive to be the best in the classroom, community, and on the mat."

He takes over a women's program that just completed its third season of competition. The Mountaineers finished 19th at the WCWA National Championships in February and have landed three WCWA all-Americans in their three years.

Christian back at EOU

Observer staff

One of the top softball players ever to don an Eastern Oregon University uniform is set to take over the program.

Nicole Christian, a former two-time all-American for the Mountaineers, has been named head coach of the EOU softball program, according to a press release from the school Tuesday.

"Nicole has an unmatched love and passion for not only the game, but for Eastern Oregon University," EOU Athletic Director Anji Weissenfluh said in the press release. "She is eager to share her deep knowledge of the game to help the softball program reach new heights. Nicole's vision and core values as a coach are in line with the expectations of the athletic department and the university."

Christian, a 2000 graduate of EOU, played during the best stretch in the program's history. She was part of the teams that reached the NAIA Nation-

als final in both 1999 and 2000, including the squad that finished fourth in the nation in 1999 and won a program-record 41 games. Christian, who was named all-American both those years, still holds several single-season and career marks, including the top all-time marks for career hits (200), RBIs (137) and walks (83), according to the EOU website. She was inducted into the EOU Athletic Hall of Fame in 2013.

"I'm extremely excited to be returning to La Grande and Eastern Oregon University," Christian said in the press release. "I embrace the challenge of competing in one of the top conferences in the country. I am looking forward to working with student-athletes while building relationships that will last long past their playing days. I love the community support of Mountie Athletics, and I am looking forward to getting on campus and getting to work."

Christian has been coaching high

school and college softball since graduating from EOU, including stints with La Grande and Umatilla high schools and Blue Mountain Community College.

Most recently, she has been the head coach at McLoughlin High School, where she led the program to unprecedented heights after taking over prior to the 2009 season. The Pioneers reached four consecutive state championships under Christian — its only title-game appearances in program history — winning it all in 2014 and 2015 and taking second in 2013 and 2016. It was a four-year stretch that saw Mac-Hi go 100-17, and a time during which it dominated the Greater Oregon League.

She takes over for Erin Dickhausen, who led the Mountaineers for two seasons. Eastern went 26-24 and reached the first round of the NAIA National Championships in 2018, but went just 13-32 in 2019 for its lowest win total since 2012.

Blazers trade E.T. to Atlanta Hawks

The Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Atlanta Hawks have traded Kent Bazemore to the Portland Trail Blazers for Evan Turner, a swap of high-priced players heading into the final year of their contracts.

Bazemore was the last holdover from the Hawks' 60-win team in 2014-15. The 6-foot-5 swingman lost his starting job midway through last season and is set to make nearly \$19.3 million in the last season of a four-year, \$70 million deal. The drafting of De'Andre Hunter and Cam Reddish figured to cut into

Bazemore's playing time even more, leading to Monday's trade.

Turner, the second overall pick in 2010, fills Atlanta's need for a backup point guard behind rookie star Trae Young and is essentially a wash in terms of costs with \$18.6 million left on his contract. The Hawks will be Turner's fifth team in 10 seasons.

Bazemore posted a gracious note to Atlanta on social media, saying he had a "lot of roots planted in this city" and thanking the team for "putting me in a situation to thrive."

Legends use big inning to top Rainier

Observer staff

A seven-run fourth inning gave the La Grande Legacy Ford Legends Seniors baseball team what proved to be an insurmountable lead on its way to an 8-4 win over the Rainier Riverdogs in American Legion action Tuesday at Optimist Field in La Grande.

The Legends took a 1-0 lead in the third inning on Riley Gregg's RBI single, then piled on in the fourth. Danny Chamberlain was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded to force in a run. Gregg hit another RBI single and Wyatt Earp collected an RBI on a bases loaded hit batter for a 4-0 lead. A pitching change did the Riverdogs no good in the frame, as Parker Robinson followed Earp with a three-run triple and scored on an error on the play for an 8-0 lead.

The Riverdogs scored in



Ronald Bond/The Observer

La Grande's Wyatt Earp delivers a pitch during the fifth inning of the Legends' 8-4 win over the Rainier Riverdogs Tuesday in American Legion action in La Grande.

each of the final three innings to cut down the deficit, but never threatened the lead.

Robinson and Gregg powered the Legends' offense

with three and two RBIs, respectively. On the mound La Grande used seven different pitchers to navigate through the game. Earp and Devin Bell each struck out two bat-

ters in an inning of work for the Legends.

La Grande (10-1 overall) next travels to the Walla Walla Tournament, which begins Thursday.

Mariners take down Brewers

The Associated Press

Daniel Vogelbach hit a two-run homer to lift the Seattle Mariners to an 8-3 win over the Milwaukee Brewers on Tuesday night for their first interleague win in five tries this season.

Marco Gonzales (9-6) pitched five innings to earn his fourth consecutive win for the Mariners, who are playing at Miller Park for the first time since 2010. Four Mariners' relievers shut out the Brewers over

the final four innings.

After the Brewers got a run in the first, the Mariners scored four times in the third off Milwaukee starter Zach Davies (7-2). J.P. Crawford drove in a run with a triple and Domingo Santana plated another with a double off the glove of Milwaukee shortstop Orlando Arcia. Vogelbach capped it with his 19th homer, a two-run, 419-foot shot into the second deck in right.

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