



Jacob Huntsman reaches out to make a save during drills at Thursday's practice. Huntsman will step in as the La Grande goalkeeper for the upcoming season, which begins today.

Ronald Bond
The Observer

The La Grande boys soccer team has a new head coach for the upcoming season. Sid Rangel, a former Eastern Oregon player who was an assistant coach under Wade Wright last fall, will lead the Tigers into the 2019 campaign — which begins today and Saturday with a pair of home matches — after Wright chose to step down following the 2018 campaign.

“Wade did an awesome job of establishing the program here, and I want to build off of that,” Rangel said Thursday. “He laid the foundation, and my goal is to keep that and take it a step further; building on the culture and building on the core values of an LHS Tiger — making sure their character is above all, and that they’re a student first and an athlete second.”

Rangel played at Eastern for three years, wrapping up his career with the Mountaineers in 2017, and said he feels “confident” taking the reins for the LHS program.

"Soccer has been a huge part of my life, and I have been around it since I was young," he said. "Being around the culture, being around the soccer community here and as a previous EOU men's soccer player here, I've gained a lot of knowledge and a lot of insight to the game. I'm ready to go to the next level in the soccer realm."

He takes over a program that went 7-4-2 overall and reached the state playoffs for the fifth year in a row, where it dropped a 2-1 match to eventual state runner-up North Marion.

La Grande lost five seniors from that squad, including leading scorer Adam Endress (13 goals in 2018) and Greater Oregon League player of the year Aaron Corsini.

But among the returners for the Tigers is the second-leading scorer from last fall in junior Callum Ebel, who had 11 goals and added a team-high nine assists.

Ebel, senior Ty Rivas and sophomore Lucas Young were first-team all-league athletes a year ago. La Grande also returns a second-team player in senior James Thurman.

"I feel like we've come a long way so far, especially in the summer," Rivas said. "We just got a new player from Germany (Levy Brembach), so that's pretty cool. He's big, tall

and awesome. I think we can go as far if not further than last year, at least."

Both Rivas and Thurman expressed optimism about the season as they wrapped up the final practice Thursday before today's opener against Wood River, Idaho.

"We've been working really hard, coaches have been pushing us, and I agree with Ty. I think we can get far," Thurman said. "I think tomorrow is a start."

Thurman said he sees an element the team had a last fall as one of its strengths.

"We have a lot of energy, just like last year," he said. "We're all excited, all ener-



Callum Ebel, above and Ty Rivas, below, are among the first-team all-Greater Oregon League players back for La Grande, which went 7-4-2 last fall.



getic. We're ready. I'm looking forward to it."

Rivas looked at passing as one of the team's major pluses and noted it's made better by the players' longevity together on the pitch.

"One of our strengths is definitely our small and quick passes, our give and goes," he said. "Some of us have been playing with each other for so long that it's natural. We do it like it's nothing."

In addition to the returners, Rangel said the team will be getting a boost from an infusion of youth.

"There's a lot of great players coming down the pipeline. Our goal as a program is to

build them up and to get them to be in competition with the varsity," he said. "Several young players (are) Owen Rinker coming as a freshman helping the defense (and) Jarom Huntsman as a sophomore, helping us with speed."

A senior, though, will step into patrol the goal, as Jacob Huntsman replaces graduate Christian Waugaman.

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The Eastern Oregon University men's cross country team was ranked 18th in the nation in the NAIA pre-season coaches poll, which came out on Thursday.

The Mountaineers, who received 260 points in the poll, are one of four ranked Cascade Collegiate Conference teams, and one of three in the top 20. Eastern is joined by No. 4 Southern Oregon, No. 6 College of Idaho, and No. 24 Oregon Tech in the rankings. A fifth CCC squad, Northwest

Christian was receiving
votes in the poll.

It's the 20th consecutive time the Mountaineers have appeared in the national poll dating back to the 2016 season, with 11 of those rankings being inside the top 10. Eastern has reached as high as fifth in the nation during the stretch. The Mountaineers' highest ranking in the last 20 years came in 2008, when the team twice was picked second.

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The La Grande Tigers shook off a rough first set to earn a season-opening victory over Vale on the road Thursday, 17-25, 25-23, 25-14, 26-24.

"We had a good night. We battled through some adversity of not performing as well in that Game 1," head coach Melinda Becker-Bisenius said.

The coach said LHS had to make an early adjustment on defense, and

executed the change well.

"Sometimes it's hard to make some game-time changes. They were trying to tip over our block, so we had to make some adjustments with covering the tips," the coach said.

Kenzie Williams had a strong all-around match with 15 digs and added 12 assists and four kills. Jayce Seavert led the offense with 11 kills and pitched in with 14 digs. Jaiden Hafer added

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