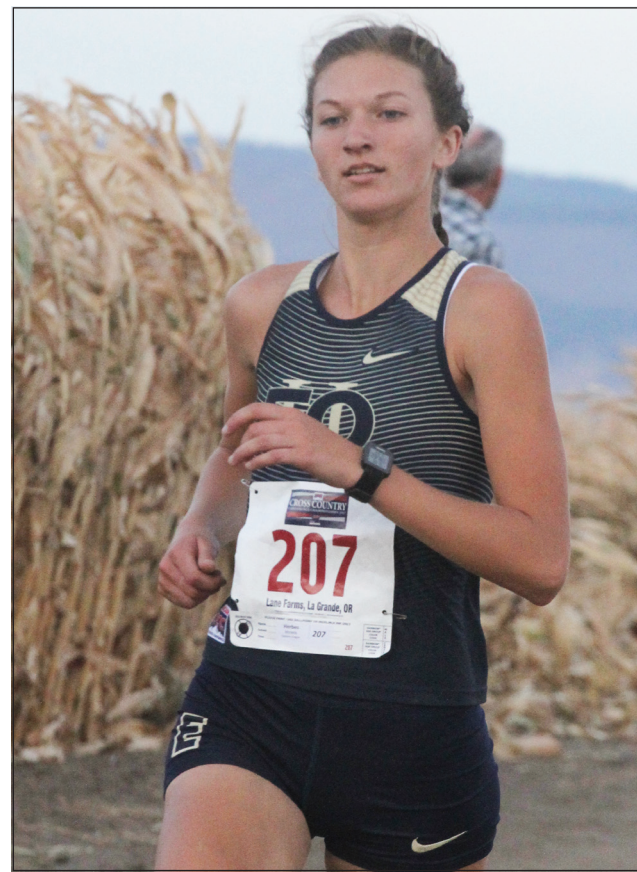




Ronald Bond/The Observer

Eastern Oregon's Jet Taylor, right, and Madison Pilon, center, attempt to block a kill during the Mountaineers match against College of Idaho Thursday night at Quinn Coliseum.

## Young Mounties set to make strides in 2019



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo

Michelle Herbes is the top returner for Eastern Oregon after reaching nationals individually in 2018.

# BIRTHDAY BLOCK PARTY

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

All Jet Taylor wanted for her 19th birthday was for Eastern Oregon to sweep rival College of Idaho.

The Mountaineers gave her just that — though the sophomore had a big hand in it.

Taylor had celebrated her birthday with 10 kills and five blocks, and the No. 8 Mountaineers swept No. 20 College of Idaho, 25-19, 25-21, 25-17, Thursday night in their home opener at a hopping Quinn Coliseum.

"I'm so happy — best birthday ever," Taylor said.

Megan Bunn added 13 kills to lead EOU and Cambree Scott had eight, and the pair, along with Taylor, helped form a nearly impenetrable wall at the net.

"We had a lot of energy coming into tonight. We knew after last weekend we had to get in gear and do things a lot better than we were doing," Bunn said. "It started with energy. It started with discipline, doing our jobs, taking and sorting things out on the court."

Scott turned in seven blocks and Bunn had six to go with Taylor's five. Taylor Tibbetts added four as EOU finished with 13 team blocks.

"We worked a lot on timing. We worked a lot on crossing the plane of the net," EOU head coach Kaki McLean-Morehead said. "Some teams that we've played have used our block, and we wanted to make sure that was not an option tonight."

Scott and Taylor, who lead EOU with 72 and 55 blocks, respectively, have helped boost EOU to one of the NAIA's



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Eastern Oregon's Sade Williams reaches out for a dig during Thursday's match against College of Idaho.

top teams in denying the opposing team's kills. After Thursday's match, Eastern, in fact, leads the nation with 138 team blocks and is in the top five with 2.8 per set.

"It's definitely something we needed to improve on coming out of Corban's game last week, so we really just dialed in on that, I think we were really focused on delaying on our first step and getting over the net (on the block)," Taylor said.

It's an even more impressive feat considering the two leading middle blockers are considered smaller middles, both being listed at 6-feet even.

"Where we lack in height, we make up for in our hops," Taylor added of her and Scott.

The middles were also effective on the attack running the slide play, where the

ball is set backwards to the right side of the net as the middle slides around to the right side for the attack.

"We tried last year, we just weren't very good at it," McLean-Morehead said. "That was something we definitely worked on in the offseason, and with shorter middles, we want to make them as effective as possible, but also able to move, and ours can move. We wanted to work on that because it's a hard play to block. They have definitely improved in that."

The kill attempts for C of I that did get through the front line were more often than not dug up by a solid back-line effort from Kiley McMurtrey, Aspen Christiansen and Sade Williams.

"Aspen and Kiley were amazing. And

See Party / Page 8A

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

Michelle Herbes got a taste of what the NAIA national championship cross country meet is like last fall.

This year, the Eastern Oregon University sophomore is hoping to take her teammates along, and there is an anticipation that the Mountaineers will be in the mix to field a full women's team to nationals this season.

"Everyone's been doing really good on their training," Herbes said. "Our workouts the past few weeks have been really good. We've been working really well together as a team. Even though we're really young, there is a lot of talent that came in, (and) a lot of the returners have talent and room to grow."

Herbes, who qualified for nationals last year as an individual, said the national meet was an "amazing experience," and believes the still-young EOU squad — which returned all seven first-year runners from last year and has even more freshmen — has the talent to get there.

"It's something we can achieve as a team as long as we work hard throughout the season and trust ourselves and our training,"

she said.

EOU head coach Ben Welch said he is really excited about the potential the EOU women have this season.

"That is a very good group," he said. "We had that huge freshman class last year and all seven of them are back. (I'm) quite excited about that. A few of them had some setbacks (in the offseason), but for the most part they look good and they're training well."

Part of what has Welch's hopes high is how the team performed in its preseason time trial.

"That was one of the best time trials we've had in a long time on the ladies side," he said, adding it was the top effort in the time trial since 2010 and noting that both Herbes and Megan Boals had top-10 all-time finishes in it. "We get a lot of good indicators out of it."

Herbes, Katie Jo Gebhardt, Boals, Alexa Jones, Calista Van Delden, Kendra Blake and Molly Gulden are all returners who competed at the Cascade Collegiate Conference meet last fall to help EOU take sixth. Eastern could also get a boost from first-year runner Ella Coughlan, a freshman from Joseph.

See Preview / Page 8A

## La Grande rolls past Nyssa on the pitch and on the court



Ronald Bond/The Observer

La Grande's Audrey Garlitz, right, and Starra Ullman, center, battle for possession with Nyssa's Ashley Macedo during Thursday's match.

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

One thing is apparent early in the season for the La Grande Tigers — they have multiple players who can find the back of the net

multiple times in a game. Audrey Garlitz registered a hat trick, Lauran Rinker added two goals during a dominant first half, and the Tigers made quick work of the Nyssa Bulldogs Thurs-

day, winning 9-0 at Community Stadium to shake off their first loss of the season.

"By the end of the summer and (as we were) starting to see things come together,

See Soccer / Page 8A



Ronald Bond/The Observer

La Grande's Jaiden Hafer, making a play at the net Wednesday, served during a 15-0 La Grande run in its sweep of Nyssa.

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

The La Grande Tigers made quick work of Nyssa. Really quick.

The Tigers scored 17 of the match's first 19 points and dominated in a 25-9, 25-16, 25-9 home win over the Bulldogs at La Grande Wednesday at La Grande High School.

"Some of the things we focused on in practice this week we were able to execute during the game," head coach Melinda Becker-Bisenius said. "We talked about protecting the tip, we talked about adjusting on our blocks and defensively, and I thought we did a good job of that tonight. When we played Nyssa in our tournament at home they tipped

See Volleyball / Page 8A