

HEAD OVER HEELS

TO BE HEALTHY AND ON THE FIELD

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

Nan Kiebert has dealt with more than her fair share of injuries during her soccer career.

An ACL tear as a senior in high school. A tear of her other ACL a year later as a college freshman. And perhaps the most unusual for a soccer player — a liver laceration — during her junior year at Eastern Oregon University.

But this fall, the forward for the No. 6 Mountaineers has stayed healthy and stayed on the field.

“This year, knowing that it’s my senior year, all I’ve really been wanting is to have one healthy season,” she said.

Kiebert has been able to turn in her best season in an EOU uniform, too, and help Eastern reach uncharted waters as it has its highest ranking ever. She is one of three players to have scored five goals and one of two players with four assists, which is the top mark on the team in both categories.

Individually, that surpasses the number of goals she had scored in her entire EOU career prior to this season (four) and is one short of the number of assists she had (five).

“That just goes to show and is a credit to her for her passion and love of the game to have gone through all that and still want to put in the time and the effort to better herself for the program,” EOU head coach Jacob Plocher said. “(It’s nice) to be able to get her healthy and back to playing (at) the caliber she feels she is capable of and be the engine for the team.”

Her first ACL injury to the left knee happened during club season and resulted in her missing the entirety of her senior season for Sandpoint High School in Idaho.

But Justin Wagar, who was the EOU head coach at the time, had already seen Kiebert play and intended to bring her to the Mountaineers anyway.

“Justin had been recruiting me and watched me play. He still wanted me to come here,” she said. “I thought that was saying something, and motivated me to want to rehab.”

Kiebert, who is pursuing a bachelor of science in nursing and plans to be a registered nurse, made an immediate impact as a freshman at EOU in 2016, breaking into the starting lineup six times in seven games and tallying three assists.

That sixth start, however, lasted only a few seconds.

“(It was) our first conference game at Evergreen,” she said. “At kickoff I passed the ball, got the ball back, took a step and tore my other (ACL).”

It meant more rehab time for Kiebert, but as a sophomore she was able to play in all 19 games for Eastern — starting in 13 of them. She scored a pair of goals and was an important piece of a team that reached the NAIA national playoffs.

Her junior year, though, was cut short by what she called the “scariest and most traumatic” of the injuries she had suffered — one that took place during the Mountaineers’ fourth game of the season, Sept. 6, 2018, against Hope International in Tahoe Vista, California.

Kiebert was trying to make a play on a ball played back by an HIU defender and hoping to head it into the goal, but the HIU goalkeeper came out to make a play on the ball.

“We had a 1-on-1, but the



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Eastern Oregon University senior Nan Kiebert executes a flip throw during the Mountaineers’ game against Carroll College last Friday. Kiebert has five goals and four assists for EOU this fall.



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Kiebert has dealt with two ACL injuries and a liver laceration during her soccer career in high school and at EOU.

ball was in the air,” Kiebert said. “When I jumped for it, she jumped too, and her knee came right under my rib cage.

“It’s hard to explain the feeling, but I knew something was wrong.”

Kiebert said she struggled to get her breath back for a while after the incident.

The nine-hour bus ride back to La Grande following the match, though, was worse. Kiebert didn’t know it at the time, but she was bleeding internally.

“Blood was pooling in my lower abdomen,” she said. “It was sensitive. I couldn’t walk straight (and) I was getting shooting pains down my neck. The next morning I went to the school to turn in my jerseys, and my trainer said to head to the hospital.”

Within 20 minutes of getting a CT scan at the hospital, LifeFlight had been called to transport her from La Grande to

Boise. “I know what kind of person she is and how tough she is,” Plocher said. “When the (HIU) trainer said she had a really bad bruise and it turned out to be something more, your heart drops a little bit. We obviously just wanted her to be able to get better and not have to worry about anything.”

The diagnosis was a Grade 4 lacerated liver, she said.

“I don’t think (the severity) really hit me until my stepmom and everyone started telling me how traumatic it actually was and that my life could have been taken away from me,” she said.

Kiebert said the injury was comparable to what “usually happens in motorcycle accidents (or) car accidents.” Her liver was about 75% torn.

“The doctor and everyone I talked to thought it was unbelievable to receive an injury like that on the soccer field,” she said.

Kiebert spent five days in the hospital in Boise but didn’t end up needing surgery. She said had she been admitted in California right after the injury, or been originally admitted to a larger hospital, she likely would have.

But because the liver is an organ that can regenerate itself, according to the Mayo Clinic website, the healing process had already begun.

“With the trauma, it made an outlining pocket for itself. It created a pocket around the laceration, so I wasn’t actively internally bleeding,” she said. “It’s hard to imagine, (but) that’s how they explained it to me.”

Rather than having surgery to repair it, Kiebert was monitored for five days in Boise, then released.

She wasn’t able to step on the soccer field until her liver was completely healed, but she began school on time a few weeks later.

While it was the most traumatic injury, it was the one she was able to come back from the quickest. She actually was healthy enough to take the field on Nov. 17 — barely two months after the injury occurred — and play in the Mountaineers’ 2-1 win at Grace, Indiana, in the NAIA playoffs.

She also played 10 days later in the round-of-16 game against eventual national champion William Carey.

“Being able to play after being out the whole season was a high-light. Standing on the sidelines had been hard,” she said.

Kiebert said she has asked the question anybody would facing as many injuries in as short of a time as she did, but she wasn’t going to stop playing.

“I must have some bad luck going on,” she said. “It definitely ran through my head, why it was happening to me, but it’s too hard to give up when you’ve been doing it your whole life.”

She’s been playing soccer since

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EOU women

picked as CCC faves once again



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo

Madison Crews and the EOU women’s basketball team are the CCC favorites.

Observer staff

The Eastern Oregon University women’s basketball team was named the favorite to win the Cascade Collegiate Conference in the CCC preseason coaches’ poll, which came out Tuesday.

The Mountaineers, which have won the past three CCC championships — including the last two outright — and are the

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No five-set thriller this time: LHS falls in three to Pendleton



Kathy Aney/EO Media Group

Jayce Seavert attempts a kill for the La Grande Tigers at Pendleton Tuesday.

By Brett Kane
EO Media Group

PENDLETON — The Buckaroos and Tigers had already clashed once before this season, where it was Pendleton’s volleyball team that made off with the five-set win. In Tuesday’s rematch, the Bucks swept in three.

In a nonleague contest at Warberg Court, the Bucks cruised to 25-12 and 25-14 wins to claim the first two sets from the 4A Greater Oregon League’s top-ranked La Grande Tigers, but were forced to rally to complete the sweep with a 26-24 third-set victory.

The home win highlighted the Bucks’ “Dig Pink” night, which was held in support of cancer awareness.

“We didn’t play our game in the first two sets,” La Grande coach Melinda Becker-Bisenius said. “We came out and stayed in it in game three, but it was the

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