

# Tigers denied tourney berth



Ronald Bond/The Observer

La Grande's Felicity Houston dives to try and return a serve during the Tigers' match against Banks Saturday. La Grande lost in three sets, and saw its season end.

**By Ronald Bond**  
The Observer

There won't be a return trip to the 4A state tournament for the La Grande Tigers volleyball team.

La Grande saw its bid for a second-straight state quarterfinal berth end at home Saturday as the visiting Banks Braves swept the Tigers, 25-22, 25-13, 26-24, in a first-round playoff match at La Grande High School.

"We knew they were really comparable to us and we were going to have to play our game," head coach Melinda Becker-Bisenius said. "We had a great year. It's obviously not how we wanted it to end, not being down at the final eight, but that's what we've got."

Banks scored five straight points to take the lead in the first set, going ahead 16-11 on an ace by Emma White. La Grande pulled to within two on two occasions, including at 23-21 on an ace by Felicity Houston, but Haylee Jackson had a kill to end the set for the early lead.

Strong serving and a tough attack helped Banks take a two-set lead after dominating the second. Three straight aces by Halle Vandomelen gave the Braves the lead for good. Three kills by Noel Herb helped push the lead to eight, and she added two more aces for a 21-11 lead.

"We knew they were going to have a strong attack," Becker-Bisenius said. "That short ball (on the serve) we struggled with in the second game. We made some adjustments in the third game."

La Grande built a sizable third-set lead as it tried to pull off what it did in the playoffs a year ago against Marshfield — rally for a win after dropping the first two sets. A kill by Presley Justice and a block by Kenzie Williams gave the Tigers a 12-7 lead. Williams had a kill later for a 15-9 lead.

Banks rallied and eventually pulled ahead, 21-20, on a kill by Jackson. A Jayce Seavert kill, a tip kill and an ace by Williams helped La Grande regain the lead, and Seavert's 10th kill put the Tigers up 24-23 and just one point from extending the match.

But Banks scored the final three points, winning the match on a kill by Izzy Applebee.

"We didn't just roll over and let them get us after that second game. We came out and battled," Becker-Bisenius said.

In the end, though, the team was denied its goal of a second-straight state tournament berth.

"I like to win more than anybody, and it's disappointing when you don't, but I'm still really proud of my kids," Becker-Bisenius said. "I felt like they did the things I asked them to and executed the game plan. There were some little things and some little rallies that (kept us from getting) the momentum. That made it hard."

Seavert led the Tigers with her 10 kills and added 15 digs. Josie Reagan added four kills, and Justice had three kills and 13 digs. Both Jacie Howton and Williams had 10 assists. Grace Neer had three kills and three blocks, and Houston had 15 digs.

The Tigers finish with an overall record of 19-6 and will lose seven seniors.

## ALSO BOBCATS REACH FIRST STATE TOURNAMENT IN FIVE YEARS

The Union Bobcats are headed to the 2A state tournament.

Union swept Gaston in its first-round home playoff match Saturday, 25-14, 25-18, 25-12, to secure its first berth to the state tourney since 2014.

"Every year that's a goal, but from game one this year our goal has been to win the next

## JOSEPH

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Joseph had steamrolled its way through every other opponent the past two seasons on its way to the 2018 state title and a berth in the 2019 title game. In its 11 contests against teams other than South Wasco, Joseph had outscored its opponents 712-52.

Joseph, which entered averaging 59.3 points per game, were held to just a first-half touchdown by Carson Littlepage.

The Redsidies scored a pair of touchdowns

game. And winning the next game at this point got us into the tournament," head coach Karly Knapp said. "It's pretty exciting for these girls to be top of the district and now headed to the state tournament. That's a big goal."

The Bobcats controlled the match with their serving, tallying 16 aces against a team in Gaston that Knapp said struggled with passing.

"We really worked on reiterating the fact that serving is important. Serving is huge for us. Getting our serves in and over the net and ideally placed was a huge goal," Knapp said. "They accomplished that."

Brianna Kohr led Union with seven aces, including, perhaps fittingly, an ace to end the match. She also had 15 digs. Callie Glenn had five aces to go with 27 assists, and Autumn Daggett had the other four aces and pitched in with 11 kills and seven digs. Kylie Marriott led Union with 13 kills.

Union (22-3 overall) has its highest win total since the 2014 team, which placed sixth at state and finished with a record of 22-8.

The Bobcats will square off against Vernonia, the No. 2 team from the Northwest League, in a quarterfinal matchup Friday evening at Ridgeview High School in Redmond.

"Going in it's mainly focus on our side of the court. That is our biggest goal right now," Knapp said of planning for state.

## BADGERS BURY JORDAN VALLEY TO MAKE STATE RETURN

The top-ranked Powder Valley Badgers are headed to the 1A state tournament for a second-year in a row and for the third time in five years.

The Badgers swept their second-round home match Saturday against Jordan Valley to reach the tournament, 25-13, 25-10, 25-18.

"They had really great energy. They went out and took care of business and executed," head coach Marji Lind said of her team. "(We're) super excited to get back to the state tournament."

Powder Valley, which enters the state tournament with a 1A-best record of 32-1, will meet Damascus Christian in the quarterfinals Friday morning at Ridgeview High School in Redmond. The teams met earlier this season at the East-West Volleyball Classic in North Powder, with the Badgers winning two out of three sets.

"That was early in the season, so I'm sure they have gotten stronger like we have," Lind said. "It's going to be a tough match for sure, but as long as we take care of the simple things the girls should come out where they need to."

Damascus Christian went undefeated in the Valley 10 League before losing in the district tournament final to reach state as the No. 2 seed.

## DAYS CREEK TOPS EAGLES

The Joseph Eagles saw their hopes for a third straight berth in the Class 1A state tournament end on the road Saturday with a straight-set loss to Days Creek in the second round of the playoffs, 25-17, 25-16, 25-20.

"I was proud of the girls for never giving up and continuing to work as a team," head coach Jill Hite said.

Sabrina Albee led Joseph with five kills and eight blocks. Molly Curry added five kills and three blocks.

The loss ends Joseph's season at 17-14.

## COUGARS FALL IN SECOND ROUND

The Wallowa Cougars fell short in their bid to make it to the 1A state tournament, suffering a sweep at St. Paul in the second round of the playoffs Saturday, 25-12, 25-9, 25-9.

The loss brings an end to the Cougars' season with a final record of 22-9.

the second half, which proved to be the difference.

Joseph was limited by injuries to a handful of key players, including Littlepage and Guylen Snyder, the coach said.

The loss, Joseph's first in 6-man play, brings its season to an end at 6-1 overall. "It was a great season," Christman said. "It showcased that we were still the team to beat even with losing all those seniors last year. We had tons of kids step into roles and develop into better athletes because of it."

# Late goal lifts La Grande boys to wild play-in victory

**By Ronald Bond**  
The Observer

The La Grande boys soccer team was already missing a couple of key players due to injury.

The team was forced to finish a man down on the field when it picked up a late red card.

The Tigers still, somehow, found a way to win and reach the state playoffs.

Westin Blake scored the game's only goal with just a few minutes to play, and the Tigers endured a wild finish to squeak by Madras, 1-0, Friday afternoon in a Class 4A play-in game at La Grande Middle School.

"Part of today's success comes from the heart," head coach Sid Rangel said. "It comes from the team trying to work together and pull off a huge victory. This was a tough match, especially since we have some injuries and we don't have a complete squad."

Callum Ebel, Ty Rivas and Owen Rinker were all either kept off the field Friday due to injury, limited by injury or hurt during Friday's match. The situation looked to be more troubling when a red card called on Adam Remily left the Tigers having to finish the match in a 10-vs-11 format.

Madras seemed primed to get the lead as it had two shots in short order with the man advantage, but La Grande goalkeeper Jacob Huntsman stopped both to keep the Tigers in the game.

"Sometimes teams play better with one man down. Part of that is the energy when that happens and it's the positive mindset that says it doesn't matter what



Ronald Bond/The Observer

La Grande's Anton Evans, left, and Westin Blake celebrate after Blake's goal in Friday's win over Madras.

happens — we're still able to persevere," Rangel said.

Blake then scored on a pass from Devin Ingram about three minutes after the red card for the lead and the eventual win.

"Devin was coming up the sideline," Blake said. "I was hoping he would drop it in, and he did, and it was down to me and the one defender. (The defender) was beating me on the front side. I cut around, and I had the one-touch shot open for me."

La Grande then had to hold on for what seemed an eternity after Blake's goal from about 15 yards. The Tigers were called for three yellow yards. Madras had two close shots blocked by defenders, and also had a corner kick and a free kick. All the action after the goal hap-

pened during stoppage time, with only the referee knowing for certain the amount of time left in the match.

"That last whistle felt like it (took) forever with how many yellows (there were)," Blake said.

The victory secured a playoff berth for La Grande for the sixth year in a row.

"That's really exciting," Blake said of the playoff berth.

La Grande (8-4-1 overall) will travel to face North Marion Wednesday in the first round of the playoffs. The contest will mark the second year in a row and fourth time in six years North Marion and La Grande have met in the postseason, with the Huskies winning the previous three meetings.

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