



Tomas Carradero/NCU Athletics

The Eastern Oregon men's soccer team celebrates following a goal during the first half of Wednesday's semifinal match against Southern Oregon.



Tomas Carradero/NCU Athletics

Eastern Oregon's Sarah Mitchell, center, controls the ball as Corban's Hannah Shore approaches during the Mountaineers' win Wednesday in the CCC semifinals.

EOU men, women reach title matches

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

The Eastern Oregon University men's soccer team is starting to get used to winning shootouts. This one sent the team to nationals for the first time. The Mountaineers tied their opponent in the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament in Springfield for the second day in a row, this time battling to a 2-2 draw against Southern Oregon in Wednesday's semifinals, then turned a perfect effort in the penalty

kick round to win it, 5-4, and reach today's championship match against top seed Corban. All five players who took the penalty kicks for EOU — Javier Moran, Joaquin Bermejillo, Jack Rose, Elvis Pavan and Erik Mattice — were true on their attempts, with the final tally from Mattice serving as the winner. The win also means an automatic NAIA playoff berth for the Mountaineers, the first in program history, regardless of the outcome

today. A win by EOU would give it the tournament title and the berth. However, by CCC rules, if the regular season champion also wins the conference tournament, the loser of the tournament title game receives an auto berth. Either way, the Mountaineers — who were long shots just to get to the CCC tournament a few weeks ago — have assured themselves of stretching their season into late November. They did so by winning five in a row to end the regular season,

and now reaching the finals despite having both of their tournament contests go in the books officially as ties before winning the shootouts. Eastern seemed like it would avoid a second draw in as many days. A goal in the fifth minute by Alexander Zuluaga and a score in the 40th from Patrick Larsen — who headed in a corner kick from Mattice — gave the Mountaineers a 2-0 lead at the break. EOU had the advantage despite being outshot by the

Raiders in the half, 9-5. The Raiders' shot margin grew in the second half and led to them ultimately pulling even. Luis Aguilar pulled SOU to within 2-1 following a goal in the 63rd minute, and Michael Miller knotted the game with just over eight minutes to play in regulation. Max Rose, who had eight saves, stopped four shots in the second half and had an additional save in the second overtime to keep EOU in the match. EOU reached the conference semifinals a year ago

but fell short in a 1-0 loss to Rocky Mountain and saw its season end one match short of nationals. Eastern (9-8-3) and Corban (16-0-2) meet at 11 a.m. today in Springfield. The Warriors dominated in the first matchup this season, winning 6-1. **EOU WOMEN ROLL INTO CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH** The Eastern Oregon University women's soccer team reached the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament semifinals for the

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Tigers ready for showdown



Ronald Bond/The Observer

La Grande's Blaine Shaw, center, pulls away from the Estacada defense on a 41-yard touchdown reception last week. The Tigers face Gladstone in the quarterfinals tonight.

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

It's the rematch a year in the making. Actually, 372 days in the making. The La Grande Tigers will get their shot at ultimate revenge and look to get past the round that has tripped them up the past two seasons when they host Gladstone tonight at Community Stadium — the team that knocked the Tigers out of the playoffs in this round a year ago. "The boys are excited for a rematch," LHS head coach Rich McIlmoil said. "They remember what that tasted like last year. I think things have worked out for a good reason this year in certain situations, and this is another one. It's good for the boys to have the rematch, and they want it." A victory would not only avenge the sting of the 30-27 loss in the 2018 4A quarterfinals — one that has served as motivation for this team since it walked off the field in Gladstone Nov. 9 of last year — but it would be the Tigers' first win in the quarterfinal round since 1976, when La Grande defeated Lake Oswego, 7-0, to reach the semifinals. "They've put in a lot of hard work and dedication to get where they're at," McIlmoil said of the team. "We're going to be excited to get after this game Friday night." The undefeated Tigers, who enter with the best scoring defense in 4A at just under 10 points per game, will face in Gladstone what defensive coordinator Matt Wolcott

said is a team that relies heavily on the run. The Gladiators, who come in at 7-2, defeated North Valley in the first round, 51-14, and average 29.9 points per game. "As coaches we try to put our players in the best position possible," Wolcott said. "We try to tell them what to expect from our opponents and just allow them to get them in position to make plays. We want them to play fast and hard." The key to defeating Gladstone? "We have to try to make them one-dimensional," he said. "If you force a run team to throw the ball, you're doing a good thing." La Grande's top-ranked offense, meanwhile, which enters scoring 47.9 points per game, will be going against a defense that is allowing 15.6 points per game and that McIlmoil said runs a 3-4 defensive front. "It's a little bit unique, especially at the high school level," the coach said. "I've done everything I can to make sure the boys are prepared. (Gladstone) likes to switch it up a little bit, and every now and then they'll make it look like they switch over to a 4-3, so we've gone through all the blocking schemes and all the appropriate formations. They like to blitz their middle linebacker, so we've been working heavy on the blitz. We're slowly working on the things they do well so we can counteract what they do well and beat them (with) what we do well." Kickoff for the contest is 7 p.m. tonight at Community Stadium.

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