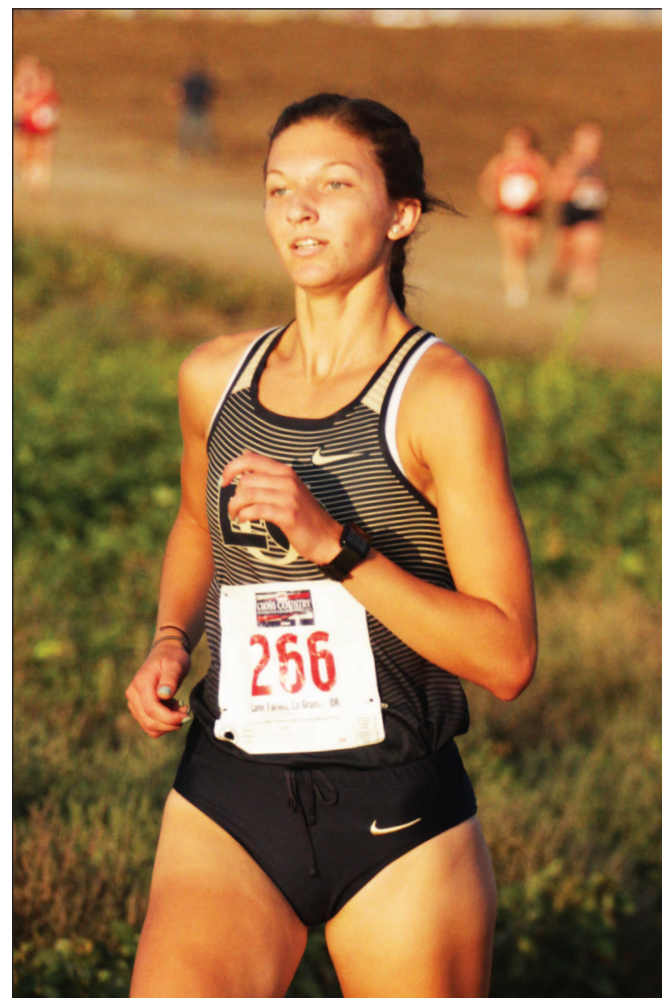


Tomas Carradero/NCU Athletics

The Eastern Oregon women's soccer team celebrates during its win over Rocky Mountain Friday in the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament. The Mountaineers begin the NAIA playoffs Friday in Siloam Springs, Arkansas.

EOU women hope for top-10 finish, men aim for top-20



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo

Michelle Herbes is the only member of the 11th-ranked Eastern Oregon women's cross country team with national experience as the team gets set for Friday's run.

Bound for Arkansas

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — There's a little extra motivation for the Eastern Oregon University women's soccer team as it heads to the NAIA national tournament after the Mountaineers learned they'll have to hit the road — and win two games in Arkansas in two days — to reach the championship tournament final site at Orange Beach, Alabama.

The Mountaineers, who claimed an automatic berth to the national tournament by winning the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament last week, learned Monday it will meet Bethel University of Tennessee in Friday's first round, with the winner on Saturday facing bracket host John Brown University on JBU's home field in Siloam Springs, Arkansas.

"There's definitely some frustration there. I think me along with a lot of other people think we should have gotten a home bid," EOU senior forward

Nan Kiebert said. "That's one thing that really irks me and motivates me to want to win the first game more, in order to prove we deserved that automatic bid."

Both contests are in Siloam Springs as part of the new format for the now 46-team national tournament. The No. 3 and No. 2 seeds in each bracket meet Friday, with the winner turning around to meet the No. 1 seed.

EOU head coach Jacob Plocher said ahead of the national tournament seeding he was hopeful his team would get a home bid, but where the game is played doesn't detract from the overall goal.

"We usually travel well and are able to show up for those games," he said. "In general with how things have shaken out with the national poll or the conference stuff, the girls are still hungry. It's been the goal from day one to get back to Alabama. It's time to show up and perform and get the

results we're capable of."

The Mountaineers (15-2-2 overall) reached as high as No. 6 in the nation early in the season and had aspirations to potentially host one of the opening round brackets. Two losses and a tie, though, during CCC action dropped EOU from the national rankings. Eastern won its final six matches — five by shutout — to secure its national bid.

"Winning (the CCC) tournament was huge," Kiebert said. "I think we can build off of that. It's keeping us motivated and bringing our confidence up. As a team, every time before a game we go over individual goals but then talk about things we can work on during the game. We've been good about going out and being successful with our goals (during the games)."

The Mountaineers bring one of the nation's top defenses into the match, as EOU has recorded 12 shutouts and allowed only 11 goals on the season.

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Men's soccer begin nationals in Kansas

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The first-ever NAIA postseason run for the Eastern Oregon University men's soccer team is taking the Mountaineers to Baldwin City, Kansas.

"It's going to be exciting," senior defender Jack Rose said. "We got nothing to lose. (We're) going to give it our all and see what we can get out of it."

Eastern's draw in the first-round bracket includes No. 16 Baker University, of Kansas, which the Mountaineers meet Friday, with the winner then squaring off Saturday against 18th-ranked Tennessee Wesleyan for a spot in the final 16 in Irvine, California.

"The guys are ready for it," head coach Zach Mills said. "They're buzzing about being able to play."

Eastern (9-9-3 overall) claimed its automatic bid to nationals as the runner-up in the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament. The Mountaineers enter having gone 5-1-2 in their last eight contests, approaching each with a back-against-the-wall mentality.

"(It was) drilled into us that every game from now on was a cup final," Rose said of the mindset beginning with the Mountaineers' Oct. 20 win over Walla Walla. "We couldn't afford to lose another game. The



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo

Eastern Oregon's Javier Moran, right, leads the Mountaineers with seven goals on the season as they begin their national run.

pressure was on for us to go ahead and make the most out of every game we had."

Mills thinks EOU could have an advantage against Baker simply because it has had to play win-or-go-home soccer for close to a month.

"I think that's why we were so successful at the end of the year and why we made it to the (conference tournament) finals," Mills said, noting that the urgency might have been missing some in the final. "One of the reasons we didn't get the

tournament trophy at the end was we knew we were in nationals. Yes, we wanted to win and played hard, (but) we play very well under pressure. It's almost like (our players) have a chip on their shoulder; that they have something to prove."

The Mountaineers had their share of tight contests during the season and their tournament run. Of EOU's 21 matches, 12 were decided by one goal or fewer. Eastern went 4-5-3 in those games, including

its two CCC tournament ties that ended in shootout victories.

"It's been an up and down year, but the seniors have been able to round up the younger guys on the team and use our experience to help them get to this stage," Rose said.

Mills said he believes his squad is similar to the Wildcats.

"Just record-wise, both teams had a crazy season, and to be in the tournament

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By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — For the first time since 2012, both the Eastern Oregon University men's and women's cross country teams will have full squads competing at the NAIA national championships.

The EOU women, ranked 11th in the nation, are sending a complete team to Friday's national championship race in Vancouver, Washington, accomplishing the feat for the first time in seven years. In the fall of 2012, EOU all-time great Karlee Coffey finished second individually to power the Mountaineers to a 13th-place finish, one spot ahead of the EOU men's 14th-place showing.

The teams are coming off of third- and fourth-place efforts for the men and women, respectively, at the Cascade Collegiate Conference meet Nov. 8. The conference is sending five teams to nationals on the women's and five on the men's side, and four of

those 10 teams are in the top 10 nationally.

Eastern Oregon head coach Ben Welch said the women's team has exceeded his expectations so far.

"Been really pleased with that, actually," he said. "I would have been happy if they were just in the top 20."

Welch pointed to two items as factors in the Mountaineers' surge this season — having two runners in Michelle Herbes and Megan Boals who are consistently able to be near the front, and the ability of the rest of the team to have different runners perform well in any given race.

"That is one of our strengths — if someone is having a bit of an off day someone else can pick them up. It takes a little bit of the pressure off of them," he said.

Welch also said the runners outside of Herbes and Boals — which at nationals will include Lisa Megargee, Mackenzie Trainer, Stormy Bul-lard, Ella Coughlan and Katie

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EOU Athletics photo

Eastern Oregon's Alex Navarro, front, is competing at the NAIA national meet for the third time.