

# Uncertainty reigns in late stages of Pac-12 season

By Anne M. Peterson  
The Associated Press

EUGENE — Oregon has locked up the Pac-12 North, but much remains uncertain for the conference — even for the sixth-ranked Ducks.

Coach Mario Cristobal’s team has a shot at a College Football Playoff berth, but it will need help from inside and outside the league. Oregon’s best hope is to face and beat No. 7 Utah in the conference championship game.

Only the Pac-12 South hasn’t been decided just yet.

A season-opening loss to Auburn dealt a major blow to the Ducks’ playoff aspirations. They responded with a string of victories in a conference known for cannibalizing its contenders.

“The best part about our guys, and it sounds like a broken record every time I come here and see you guys after a game, our guys feel like we still haven’t played our best football,” Cristobal said.

The Ducks (9-1, 7-0) have two more regular season games, the first at Arizona State (5-5, 2-5) on Saturday, and the Civil War rivalry game at home against Oregon State on Thanksgiving weekend.

Following Oregon’s 34-6 win over Arizona on Saturday, quarterback Justin Herbert looked back to his freshman year, when the Ducks went 4-8 under Mark Helfrich. Then there was Willie Taggart’s lone season before Cristobal steadied the ship. Now there’s a chance to do something special.

“It’s a sign of all the hard work that we’ve put in, and it’s a great opportunity for us,” Herbert said.

Further down the North division standings, a few teams are chasing bowl eligibility. Surprising Oregon State (5-5, 4-3) is currently second, with Washington (6-4, 3-4) and Stanford (4-6, 3-5) still in play as runners-up to the Ducks. California (5-5, 2-5) and Washington State (5-5, 2-5) are at the bottom of the pack.

Huskies coach Chris Petersen said the tough part about this season was losing games the team felt it should have won.

“I know it’s just sports and there’s a lot more things in life that are important than

that, winning and losing football games. We all get that. But in terms of the energy and importance, and the effort that everybody puts into it, it is hard to reload and stay focused. And keep scratching and keep clawing, keep supporting each other,” Petersen said.

“That’s hard. I think there’s a lot of good that can come out of that. Not just for these kids football-wise but other things down the road.”

**THE SOUTH**

This is where it gets complicated.

Utah looked simply dominant in its 49-3 victory over UCLA this past weekend. The Utes (9-1, 6-1) were picked in the preseason to win the conference title.

But first Utah needs to lock up the South. The team faces Arizona (4-6, 2-5) on the road Saturday and Colorado (4-6, 2-5) at the end of the season.

Meanwhile, USC (7-4, 6-2) is still lurking. While the Trojans have fewer overall victories than Utah, they have that all-important victory over the Utes at the Coliseum earlier this season.

Utah has won six straight since that loss, and now the Utes are trying to stay focused while taking in more national attention.

"It certainly gets louder and there is more of it, but you still have to take the same approach and the same M.O. of just not listening to it and keeping your vision and focus with what the immediate task at hand is," coach Kyle Whittingham said. "Our guys to this point have done a great job of that and here we are with the last two games of the regular season and hopefully we don't deviate from that now."

**BOWL ELIGIBILITY:** Just four teams — Oregon, Washington, USC and Utah — have the prerequisite six wins for bowl eligibility in the league at this point. In 2018 the Pac-12 passed a rule requiring teams to have six, so no five-win teams will qualify.

The winner of this week’s game between Washington State and Oregon State in Pullman will become bowl eligible. Technically, 11 Pac-12 teams can earn a spot in the postseason. It’s unlikely, but possible.

The conference could also wind up with only five bowl-bound teams.

# Seavert leads all-GOL awards

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Considering how dominant the La Grande Tigers were on the volleyball court in Greater Oregon League play this fall, it should come as no surprise that they owned the all-league awards.

Seven Tigers garnered all-GOL recognition, led by a sweep of the league player of the year and coach of the year awards by senior Jayce Seavert and coach Melinda Becker-Bisenius.

“I definitely was really excited about how many kids I got on first team, (and) I was excited to get Jayce as player of the year,” Becker-Bisenius said.

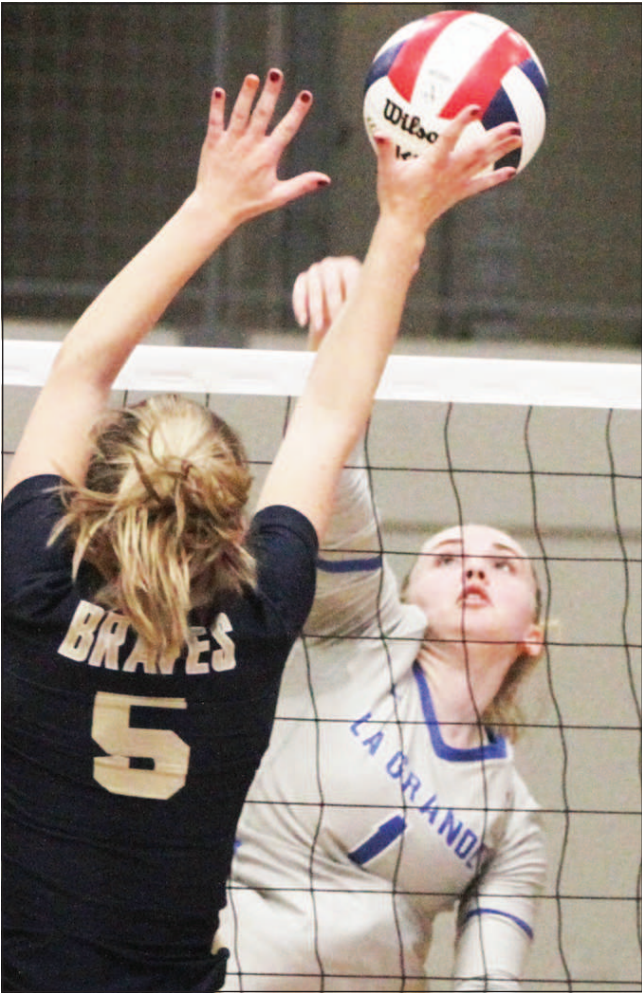
In all, six Tigers made the first team, including five seniors.

Seavert, a tough-to-stop all-around player for the Tigers, was a unanimous selection as player of the year after sharing the award in 2018. In the six league matches, she finished with 51 kills, 59 digs and 10 blocks.

“She’s just an all around great volleyball player,” Becker-Bisenius said. “She’s the complete package defensively and offensively.”

Justice, the lone junior among the first-team athletes for LHS, led the team in kills during league play with 55 and was second in digs with 64. Justice also had 19 service aces, which was second on the team.

Kenzie Williams and Jacie Howton, the setter combination for the Tigers, finished with 82 and 81 assists, respectively. Williams



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo  
La Grande’s Jayce Seavert, right, was named Greater Oregon League volleyball player of the year.

was also third on the team in kills with 26, while Howton had a team-best 23 aces. Williams also had 44 digs, and Howton added 23.

Felicity Houston led the Tigers — and the league — with 84 digs as the La Grande libero and was fourth on the team overall with eight aces.

Jaiden Hafer rounded out the first team selections with a team-best 22 blocks. The senior also had 16 kills and 10 aces.

Josie Reagan represented

the Tigers on the second team, finishing with 15 kills and 13 blocks.

Becker-Bisenius credited the players and the assistant coaches for her ability to receive the coach of the year honor.

“I had a great coaching staff. We all worked really well together,” she said. “It’s an award for the whole coaching staff. They work just as hard as I do.”

La Grande went a perfect 6-0 in GOL play for the second year in a row.



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo  
Felipe Madero, bottom, and the Mountaineers went 5-1-2 in their final eight matches to punch their ticket to the NAIA national tournament.

## MEN

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for either team is a great accomplishment,” he said.

“From what we’ve heard, they press high and press hard. They seem to have some talent across the board. Every player brings something dynamic to the field, and that’s what we pride ourselves on.”

EOU has a scant 47-39 goal differential on the season, the smallest of the three teams in the bracket. Javier Moran is the leading scorer for EOU, entering nationals with seven goals. Patrick Larsen and Alexander Zuluaga each have five goals. Max Rose has 51 saves in net, the most of any of the three starting goalkeepers.

Baker (11-6-3 overall) earned an at-large bid to nationals as the No. 4 team from the challenging Heart of America Athletic Conference, which sent six teams to the 46-team tournament. The Wildcats won five of

their final seven matches to reach nationals for the seventh year in a row, and they have won an opening-round match each of the past two seasons.

Lucas Jacobs and Jordan Alonge are the two main targets for EOU to track on the offensive end, with each scoring 11 goals on the season to lead the Wildcats’ offense. Jordan Lake has added six goals and a team-high eight assists.

Baker has a mixed bag on defense. The Wildcats have given up 28 goals on the season, and five times have allowed three or more, but also have pitched seven shutouts and have allowed just one goal on six other occasions. Baker is 9-2-2 when allowing one goal or fewer. Baker, like EOU, has had it share of close matches, with a 4-3-3 record in games decided by one goal or fewer.

If the Mountaineers top Baker, they’ll meet Appalachian Athletic Conference regular-season champion Tennessee Wesleyan, the

top seed in the Baldwin City bracket. Wesleyan had a 15-1-2 stretch end with a loss to Union College in the AAC semifinals.

The Bulldogs are the lowest-scoring team of the trio, with just 45 goals on the season, but they are also the best defensively, giving up 23 goals on the season and holding 13 opponents to one goal or fewer. Josh Conradie leads a balanced offense with eight goals. Kyle Wynne has scored seven goals, and Montel McKenzie has six goals and a team-high seven assists.

The Mountaineers will have some insider information on Tennessee Wesleyan should they advance to face the Bulldogs, as Max Rose is a transfer from TWU and spent a season in the program.

“Even if it’s just basic, it’s nice to know he’ll have a behind-the-scenes view,” Mills said. “He’s going to be able to provide some good insight. Every tiny advantage you can have can win a game and help you move on.”



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo  
Eastern Oregon’s Nan Kiebert leads the Mountaineers in scoring with 12 goals as they begin their national playoff run.

## WOMEN

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Cyndi Cottrell and Savannah Hutchinson have combined for 49 saves and an 81.7% save rate.

The offense has been led by Kiebert and Morgan Farrington, who have 12 and 10 goals, respectively. Each also has a team-best seven assists.

EOU has scored 60 goals on the season.

Plocher said he likes the draw the Mountaineers have this weekend.

Eastern’s opponent Friday, Bethel, earned an at-large berth to nationals and is making its fourth all-time appearance. The Wildcats, entering with an overall record of 12-5-1, were the third-place team in the Southern States Athletic Conference.

Bethel is led offensively by Janine Davis, who is 12th in the nation in scoring with 22 goals on the season. Davis also has a team-leading nine assists, meaning she’s had a part in more than half of Bethel’s 53 goals on the season.

“(Davis) has done a majority of the scoring, (according to) scouting reports and film. Hopefully we’ll be able to contain her, and if we do what we’re able to do offensively we should be able to put ourselves in a good spot,” Plocher said.

Defensively, the Wildcats have allowed 18 goals. Bethel has posted eight shutouts on the season and held seven other opponents to just one goal. Only William Carey and Martin Methodist — the No. 2 and No. 5 teams in the nation — have managed to score multiple goals on the Wildcats. Keeper Shanay Ricketts has 56 saves on the season.

Plocher believes Eastern’s speed on offense can be an advantage.

“Their back line isn’t the strongest and

quickest, so with our speed and ability to turn the corner we should be able to get going that way,” he said.

A win Friday would pit EOU against the host John Brown Golden Eagles, the No. 2 team out of the Sooner Athletic Conference and No. 16 team in the nation. Like Bethel, the Golden Eagles earned an at-large berth to nationals, and they have a 12-3-3 record on the season. John Brown has allowed just 12 goals in its 18 games and has 11 shutouts. The Golden Eagles also have wins over then-No. 8 Science & Arts (Oklahoma), then-No. 16 Georgia Gwinnett, and a tie with Martin Methodist. JBU is the only team to have a win over Science & Arts, which has a nation-leading 120 goals on the season.

Anne Metz leads a balanced offense for JBU with 10 goals and teammate Jenna Miller has nine goals for a team that has 56 goals on the season. Keeper Caitlyn Logan has 56 saves for an 82.4% save percentage. “They’re definitely a quality team, that’s the reason they’re hosting,” Plocher said.

The challenging early slate for EOU, however, which saw it play three top-25 opponents, should help.

“With our nonconference (games) and the results, that’s why we play those games, to prepare us for (these) situations,” he said.

Kiebert noted there is a sense of urgency, given that for her and the rest of the seniors, any game could be the last, which is serving as motivation, too.

“It’s terrifying going out thinking each game could be my last one,” she said. “(At some point) this is going to be the last game for everyone as this team. It’s dramatic for everyone. You want to utilize and give your all in each game whether you’re a senior or not.”