

Eastern women win on the mat, but fall due to forfeits

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — On the mat, the No. 12 Eastern Oregon University women's wrestling team was better than No. 9 Southern Oregon Friday night.

The visiting Raiders, though, boosted in the score column by three EOU forfeits, managed to escape their dual against the Mountaineers in Quinn Coliseum, 22-20, in a battle of top 15 teams.

"That was a crazy dual," head coach Mike Ayala said. "It was a whole lot of fun to be a part of and watch, even though we lost 22-20. That was the best we've ever wrestled Southern. I'm really happy with how we wrestled."

In spite of the loss, the Mountaineers were encouraged — and even a bit shocked — by how close the dual was, considering they in essence gave SOU 15 points on the forfeited matches (a fourth match was a double forfeit). The Mountaineers won four of the six contested matches.

"Without forfeits, we beat



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Eastern Oregon's Cassidy O'Hara, top, controls Southern Oregon's Marissa Kurtz in their match during Friday's dual at Quinn Coliseum.

them," senior Jessica DeHart said. "We came out really strong and impressed a lot of people. Personally I didn't think it would be that close of a score, but we did really good. When we wrestle them in duals again, if we have a full lineup, we're going to be able to really contend and beat them."

The contest came down to the 170-pound match between EOU's Dempsey Talkington, who was wrestling up a weight class against Tristyn Borden. The wrestlers traded two-point takedowns in the first round. Talkington went ahead 4-2 with a takedown with two minutes to go in the final round before Borden evened the match at 4-4 with her own takedown. Both wrestlers had an opportunity to score in the final moments and had the Quinn Coliseum crowd on edge before Borden

notched one more two-point takedown for the lead with about 10 seconds to go and a 6-4 win.

The move to bump Talkington up from her original 155-pound match to 170 came late.

"It was a last-minute, 'OK, Dempsey, you're bumping up to wrestle because I think this is a better matchup for us,'" Ayala said. "It proved that it was. It was really close.

That was the right move to make. Dempsey's tough. She wrestles our 191 pounders in practice all the time, and I knew I wasn't asking her to do something she already doesn't do."

The outcome pulled SOU within 20-17, and a forfeiture at 191 gave the Raiders the margin needed to steal the win.

The dual started with three pins in three matches by the Mountaineers to grab a 15-0 lead. DeHart (109 pounds) shook off an early takedown and 4-1 deficit to grab a lead with her own four-point takedown against Macie Stewart, then finished off her opponent seconds later with a pin late in the first round.

Amber Pair extended the Mountaineers' lead to 10 with a pin at 116 over Carolina Johnson. Pair held a 4-2 lead most of the second and final round, then scored a takedown with about 45 seconds to go and worked the shoulders of Johnson to the mat for a pin with 15 seconds remaining.

"I'm pretty excited about it," Pair said of the team's ef-

fort Friday. "I think we have a good team this year. Coming out in the beginning (and) working hard and seeing progress in each and every one of us, I think that's exciting. This will benefit us later in the season too."

Macy Higa scored the third win by fall, but she had to shake off a rough first set to do so. SOU's Tara Othman tallied two takedowns for a 6-0 lead after one round of their 123-pound match. Higa responded to tie the match at 6-6, using a pair of takedowns along the way, then finished off Othman with a pin with about a minute to go.

EOU's Cassidy O'Hara controlled Marissa Kurtz in their match at 130, earning a 7-1 decision to extend the lead to 18-1. The Raiders finally picked up a victory when Anesia Ramirez notched two late takedowns to secure a 9-3 decision over Morgan Shines at 136. Two forfeits brought the score to 19-14 to set the stage for the 170-pound clash.

"They have five all-Americans on their team," Ayala said. "We gave them everything they could handle."

EOU men win at Spokane

Observer staff

LA GRANDE — The Eastern Oregon wrestling teams followed up Friday's duals with strong performances Sunday at the Spokane Open, as the men won the team title and the women took fourth.

The men scored 161.5 points for the first tournament title by the program since its reinstatement four years ago.

EOU had two individual titles, with Ryan Ninman taking the top spot at 157 pounds and Marco Retano winning 184 pounds.

Ninman went 5-0 on the day, and won the title match over Southern Oregon's Jeremy Talavera by an injury default. Retano also posted a 5-0 record and, like Ninman, defeated an SOU wrestler as he eked out a 6-5 decision over Tanner Sallee.

Both Keegan Mulhill (174 pounds) and Ryan Redford (197) finished third in their weight classes. Mulhill went 4-1 on the day, shaking off a semifinal loss to win his final

two bouts, and Redford went 6-1, and won his final four matches to jump to third.

John Bittinger (157) went 3-2 to take fourth, Blake McNall (141) took fifth with a 4-2 record and Hunter Nees (125), Monte Zufelt (133), and Josh Pine (165) all took sixth.

The EOU women had four placers on their way to fourth place, led by Jessica DeHart, who won her final three matches to take third place at 109 pounds. DeHart defeated Alexia Seal — who had beaten her earlier in the tournament — by a 6-4 decision in the third-place match.

Amber Pair (116) took fourth with a record of 3-2 on the day, and both Morgan Shines (136) and Dempsey Talkington (155) placed sixth. Shines finished with a 1-2 record, and Talkington went 2-2.

The men's team is off until Dec. 13 when they wrestle MSU-Northern in Reno, Nevada, while the women are at the Olympic Trials Qualifier Dec. 19 in Fort Wayne, Texas.

Late free throw dooms EOU

Observer staff

LA GRANDE — Megan Dorney hit the game-winning free throw with two seconds to play, and the Whitworth Pirates completed a rally in the fourth quarter for a 70-69 victory over the No. 8 Eastern Oregon University women's basketball team Friday night in Spokane, Washington.

The comeback capped a battle that saw both teams blow double-digit leads — Whitworth led by 12 late in the first quarter, and Eastern held a 13-point lead late in the third. The Mountaineers' biggest advantage came when Madison Crews hit a 3-pointer for a 54-41

lead with 1:38 to play in the third quarter.

Whitworth cut the deficit to seven by the end of the quarter and eventually pulled even at 67-67 on a Macey Morales 3-pointer in the final minute.

Crews converted a layup to give EOU the lead back, but Sydney Abbott tied the game with 20 seconds to play before Dorney split a pair at the line late for the win.

Whitworth charged out to an early 19-7 lead on a Morgan Winder layup and led 21-11 after one quarter. The Pirates still led by nine midway through the second before Eastern went on a 13-0 run to take the lead.

Megan Still started the run with a 3-pointer, and ended it with consecutive layups for a 35-31 lead.

Eastern was up 37-34 at the half and held the lead until the final minute.

Beverly Slater and Jill Albright both scored 14 points — Albright on 7-for-8 shooting — to lead the Mountaineers. Slater added 12 rebounds for her fifth double-double of the season. Emma Logan added nine points and 10 rebounds for Eastern, which shot 46% but was just 23% from 3-point range and committed 25 turnovers.

Eastern (5-3 overall) faces Linfield Friday at the Lady Yote Classic in Caldwell.



Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group

La Grande defenders Brody MacMillan (11) and Payton Cooper (8) take down The Dalles running back Denver Neill (1) during Saturday's game.

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365 on the ground, easily its highest total of the postseason in both categories. Robinson followed Reed's big night with 94 yards rushing, and MacMillan had 64 yards rushing.

"We just played great and we executed," Robinson, who was 4-for-7 passing for 134 yards, said. "Coach Mac has put in his heart and soul. Same with Wolcott and all these coaches. I try to think we just play for then, and that we just play La Grande football. I'm so pumped for my team and coaches. We're a step closer to our goal."

The performance amounted to La Grande's most dominant win of the season over a team that, on paper, looked as if it would be able to keep the contest closer than the 48-14 rout when the teams met in September. The Riverhawks had won five of their past six entering the game, and had a key player available who missed the first game — leading receiver Zac Anderson.

It became clear in a hurry that wouldn't be the case. La Grande snuffed out the Riverhawks' running game, holding The Dalles to just 71 first-half yards rushing. The Dalles

(7-5) had some success through the air, but only once in the first half moved inside the La Grande 30. The Dalles also turned the ball twice, both of which led to two more Tiger touchdowns.

"We thought it was going to be a dogfight. They got better, but we got way better," senior lineman Spencer Gerst said.

The Dalles finished with 167 yards in the first half, and 277 for the game, a week after amassing 500 yards in a 58-51 shootout victory over Tillamook.

Denver Neill rushed for 132 yards for The Dalles. Okean Green, the Riverhawks' leading rusher, had just 15 yards rushing but added 54 yards receiving.

"This team can move the football, so it says a lot about coach Wolcott as a coach," McIlmoil said. "They just dial this defense in, they know what to expect and they play hard on a weekly basis."

Both Banks and La Grande will be playing for their second state championship in football. The Braves defeated Seaside in last year's title game, 31-20. La Grande's most recent championship game was a 26-7 win over Corvallis in the 1974 title game. Both programs are 1-2 all-time in the final.



Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group

La Grande running back Brody MacMillan (11) runs the ball for a touchdown during the fourth quarter of Saturday's game.

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— 1,081 yards, in fact — is against other teams. Against La Grande, he has 23 yards rushing in two games, and had 15 Saturday. One play in particular that stands out is a 7-yard loss Green suffered on the fly sweep midway through the first quarter, and on that particular play, the Tiger defense strung the receiver out and ripped him down in the back field. He had no chance at all, and it was an indicator of the night to come.

The LHS offense, meanwhile, shook off a rough outing against Gladstone a week ago and had its best effort of the season. Yes, La Grande scored more (70) against Cottage Grove a few weeks ago, but that was against a hapless team

that gave up 54.6 points per game against teams other than La Grande. The Tigers simply could not be stopped. They scored on their first eight possessions, not at all unlike the first game against The Dalles when they scored the first seven times they had the ball. In fact, La Grande scored 15 times on 19 possessions in two games against the Riverhawks. The running game was its usual, efficient self (see 11.4 yards per carry).

The passing game, though not often used (16.7% of La Grande's plays in the post-season have been passes) was on point.

So in reality, I shouldn't have been too stunned by the outcome. It's not surprising, when you did into the numbers further, to see how they could have dominated the way they dig Saturday.

This is a team on a mission. The championship game against Banks is next. The defending state champions are a much more formidable foe than The Dalles. The Braves are on a 22-game winning streak, and like La Grande have a dynamic offense and a stout defense.

I'm not going to put a prediction in this column. It's way too early in the week, and there are a lot of numbers to crunch before Saturday.

I don't expect the game to be a blowout one way or another, but I will say this: If La Grande plays as well against Banks as it did against The Dalles — heck, as well as it has the entire playoffs — I could see the Tigers running away with that first state title in 45 years.

Better put: It wouldn't shock me.