

Williams inks spot with BMCC

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Kenzie Williams has been an important, versatile piece of the La Grande volleyball team during her career.

Blue Mountain Community College noticed that and offered the senior a position with its volleyball program. Williams signed her official letter of intent at a ceremony Thursday.

“I’m super proud of her,” LHS head coach Melinda Becker-Bisenius said. “It’s always exciting when your athletes decide to go

on and play at the next level. Kenzie has put a lot of time and energy into volleyball. I’m really excited for her. I’m also excited for her mom (Cindy Williams) — she’s done a lot of stuff to help Kenzie get there. I think it’s a great thing.”

The senior has shown an ability to do a little bit of everything on the volleyball court, as she has played as a setter and an attacker, been a solid defender and a stronger server. In six Greater Oregon League matches this season, she had 62 assists, 26 kills and 40 digs and was a

perfect 100% from the service line while playing a variety of positions — mainly setter and right side hitter.

“When I was (at BMCC) practicing I did work on all positions — digging, hitting, setting, and I think I can do well in all those, but obviously I can learn,” Williams said, adding she believes she’ll be primarily setting for BMCC, “but we’ll see when the season starts.”

Williams got in contact with the Timberwolves shortly after the Tigers’ season ended. She worked

See **Williams** / Page 8A



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

La Grande volleyball player Kenzie Williams, center, signs her letter of intent Thursday to play with Blue Mountain Community College. Williams is flanked by her parents, Clint and Cindy.

Tigers struggle, lose to Nyssa

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — First-half turnovers, second-half shooting struggles and a lack of energy hurt La Grande Tuesday night.

The Tigers scored just 11 points in the second half, one that saw them shoot just 17%, as they lost a halftime lead in a 50-35 home setback against the Nyssa Bulldogs.

“The thing that jumped out to me was shot selection — one pass in and fire isn’t the most productive,” head coach Mark Carollo said. “(And we had) 20-plus turnovers. We didn’t have a lot of fight in us tonight. I thought we had one good quarter.”

La Grande scored on its first possession in the third quarter on a Justin Jenner layup to take a 26-20 lead, matching its largest advantage of the game.

It was all Nyssa from there. Pedro Chaves tied the score with a pull-up 3-pointer then followed with a layup to put the Bulldogs ahead, 28-26, and a 3 later by Leonardo Barba gave Nyssa a 33-28 lead and capped a 13-2 run.

Cristian Mendoza’s jumper pulled the Tigers within 33-31 late in the third, but Nyssa ran away from there, finishing the game on a 17-4 run and holding La Grande to just one field goal — a Mendoza jumper — in the fourth.

The team lost energy after halftime, and Carollo said seeing the Bulldogs’ run in the second half had an impact.

“I’m still trying to figure these guys out a little bit. We have a tendency to have a couple plays not go our way and then get down on ourselves. In basketball you gotta have a mindset that ‘that play happened,’ and you gotta move on from it,” he said. “You could see body language down a little bit (when Nyssa rallied). You could see our demeanor sink into the chair instead of having a little fight back and want to go after it.”



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

La Grande’s Justin Jenner puts in a reverse layup during the third quarter Tuesday against Nyssa. The Tigers lost to the Bulldogs, 50-35.

PREP BOYS BASKETBALL

The Tigers also settled for several 3-pointers in the second half and went 0-for-14 from deep. They had been 4-for-10 in the first half. The inconsistency is something Carollo said the team is struggling with in the early stages of the season.

“There are signs that we can be competitive and play well, and then there are quarters or a couple minutes within each quarter that we have these big lapses. It’s really hard to come back from some of those lapses,” he said. “We’re still working on working out some of

these kinks. It’s still a fairly young team as far as varsity experience. We’re just trying to build some confidence into the kids. They’re good players, they’re good shooters. We just gotta make sure we are doing things the right way.”

La Grande scored the game’s first six points and the final five of the first quarter to take a 14-9 lead on Mendoza’s 3-pointer. The Tigers led despite committing nine first-quarter turnovers, largely due to shooting 63% in the first.

Consecutive 3s by Devin Bell gave La Grande a 17-11 and then a 20-14 lead in the second. Nick DuVernay’s late layup pushed the lead to six

again before the Tigers took a 24-20 lead into the locker room.

La Grande struggled from the floor overall, shooting just 27%. Kaleb Myer was the leading scorer with 10 points, and both Mendoza and Bell added seven. The area in which the Tigers were most effective was on the glass, owning a sizable 36-20 rebounding margin, with Zach Wiggins grabbing eight and both Myer and Mason Mellinger collecting six.

Barba and Chaves had 18 points apiece to lead Nyssa.

La Grande (1-3 overall) faces Skyview, Idaho, Thursday at the Today’s Dentistry Elite Eight in Nampa.

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Brees breaks all-time TD passing record in win

By Brett Martel
The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Drew Brees trotted along the sideline holding his helmet and a Hall of Fame-bound ball in his left hand while using his right hand to wave and blow kisses to an adoring Superdome crowd.

Another milestone, another memory, for an undersized and once underestimated player who has broken just about every significant record a quarterback can break — and doesn’t look anywhere near done at age 40.

Brees became the NFL’s all-time leader in touchdown passes, throwing for four scores to lead the New Orleans Saints to a 34-7 victory over the Indianapolis Colts on Monday night.

“It was special, everything about the night,” Brees said. “It just kind of makes your whole life and career flash before your eyes, because I never thought I’d have a chance to be part of something like this.”

The scoring strike that broke Peyton Manning’s record of 539 career touchdown passes came in the third quarter, when Brees hit tight end Josh Hill for a 5-yard score. Brees’ next pass in the game was the

541st scoring toss of his career, a 28-yarder to reserve QB and utility player Taysom Hill that put the Saints up 34-0.

“He’s done that to a lot of defenses,” Colts coach Frank Reich said. “When he gets like that, I don’t know that anybody can stop him.”

Now in his 19th season, the 6-foot Brees — a 2001 second-round draft choice — came into the game already holding NFL records for completions with 6,792 and yards passing with 72,577. He built on those numbers while also setting a record for completion percentage in a game. He completed 29 of 30 passes — 96.7% — for 307 yards before being relieved by Teddy Bridgewater in the fourth quarter. That broke the mark Philip Rivers had held since completing 28 of 29 (96.6%) against Arizona last season.

“He had a hot hand, obviously,” Saints coach Sean Payton said. “Guys were making plays, but that’s awfully difficult to do.”

The victory kept the Saints (11-3), who’d already won the NFC South, in the running with Seattle (11-3), San Francisco (11-3) and Green Bay (11-3) for one of the top two seeds in the NFC playoffs.

See **Brees** / Page 8A

PREP GIRLS ROUNDUP

Outlaws send Elgin to first loss

Observer staff

Ashlyn Gray led the way with 11 points Monday as the Enterprise Outlaws ran their winning streak to four games in a row with a 48-28 victory in Elgin, ending the Huskies’ four-game winning streak to start the season.

Rilyn Kirkland added seven points and Claire Farwell had six for the Outlaws, who built a 22-10 lead at the half and pushed the lead to 21 after three quarters.

“We are headed in the right direction (and) getting better every day,” head coach Mike Crawford said.

Tymra Anderson scored 15 points in the loss to lead the Huskies.

Enterprise (5-1 overall) visits Imbler Thursday,

while Elgin (4-1) faces Jordan Valley at the Union Christmas Classic.

WALLOWA GETS SECOND WIN

Shanna Rae Tillery scored 13 points Monday night, and the Wallowa Cougars built a double-digit first-half lead en route to a 27-21 road win over the La Grande junior varsity.

The Cougars took control early and had a 19-7 lead at the break, then held on for the win despite scoring just eight points in the second half.

“(We) played really good defense for the entire game but forgot to come out for the second half,” head coach David Howe said.

The Cougars (2-4 overall) visit Condon/Wheeler Friday.

Mountaineers win two at CCC/GPAC

Observer staff

LA GRANDE — The Eastern Oregon University men’s wrestling team went 2-1 Sunday at the CCC/GPAC duals in Prescott, Arizona.

The Mountaineers dropped a close 22-20 dual to Southeastern (Florida) but defeated Arizona Christian, 27-10, and Morningside (Iowa), 27-25.

In the dual against Southeastern, the Mountaineers dropped six of the 10 matches,

es, but half of their wins came by fall to keep EOU close. Blake McNall (141 pounds) scored a pin against Jaquan English, and Ryan Redford took down Jesse Pryor at 197 pounds. EOU also earned wins from Josh Pine (165), in a 15-0 technical fall, and Keegan Mulhill (174), who earned a 6-0 decision.

In the win against Arizona Christian, Eastern Oregon took seven of the 10 matches and won at each weight from

157 pounds and up. Pine earned a pin at 165 against Collin Nicholson, and Marco Retano (184) scored a 20-0 technical fall. Mulhill added a 16-3 major decision at 174, and Monte Zufelt (2-0 decision at 133), John Bittinger (7-5 decision at 157), Redford (6-4 decision at 197) and Cade Woodward (4-2 sudden victory at 285) added victories.

In the final dual against Morningside, Pine and Retano pinned Alexander

Thompson and Tucker Bassinger, respectively. Mulhill had a 16-0 technical fall, and McNall posted a 16-8 major decision.

Eastern also had six wrestlers — three unattached — compete over the weekend at the Reno Tournament of Champions, but all six went two-and-out.

The Mountaineers are next in action Jan. 11 at home against Big Bend Community College.