



Photo by Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group

La Grande football players, from left, Zach Wiggins, Dawson Gaertner, Nathan Reed and Brody MacMillan, celebrate following Reed's interception return for a touchdown in the third quarter of the 2019 4A state championship game. The Tigers could find themselves in a hybrid 4A/3A league in 2020 that would merge the GOL and the EOL.



Photo by Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group

La Grande's Parker Robinson was one of three Tigers who are up for a state player of the year award.

More state, league domination for LHS

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The La Grande Tigers loaded up on players named to the 4A all-state football team, much the same way they loaded up on wins during their 2019 state title season.

The Tigers picked up nine first-team all-state bids — three players got two apiece — and 12 all-state nods overall, The Oregonian announced this week.

Additionally, the Tigers have an opportunity to sweep offensive, defensive and coach of the year categories. Quarterback Parker Robinson and running back Nathan Reed are among the finalists for offensive player of the year.

"I think both have a good argument to be player of the year," head coach Rich McIlmoil said. "I really hope it's one of them. I'll be amazed if it's not."

Gabe Shukle, meanwhile, is in the running for defensive player of the year.

"He got GOL defensive player of the year, and he was pretty dominant on defense. He's got a shot," McIlmoil said.

The coach also earned a nod as finalist for coach of the year.

"It really shows how hard he has worked and his dedication to our team,"

Reed said of McIlmoil's nomination. "It was very special how he developed and cared for us not only as football players but as young men as well."

Those final three awards will be announced early next week.

"I kind of expected it," McIlmoil said of the bevy of all-state awards. "Those kids put in a lot of hard work to get to that point. I thought our kids deserved it. All the recognition we got, they deserved it."

Reed was a first-team selection at running back and at linebacker.

"I thank my family, team, coaches and the community for all their support," Reed, who was also the GOL offensive player of the year, said about being both the league POY and a finalist for the state award. "Also I'd like to give a special thanks to the offensive line for doing such an amazing job this year without receiving much of the glory."

Shukle was a first-team winner at tight end and on the defensive line.

The senior said he was "thankful" to be nominated as the state's defensive player.

"I'd like to thank my family, friends and coaches for getting me to where I am today," he said. "And I'm also very grateful for my

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Could the Greater Oregon League be GREAT AGAIN?

■ Latest proposal for prep football in 2020-22 includes a 4A/3A hybrid league between GOL and EOL

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Greater Oregon League could see a revival in 2020.

Or, at least, become a hybrid of greatness in football.

The Oregon School Activities Association's football ad hoc committee is looking to realign some leagues for the final two years of the 2018-22 block, and its latest proposal, announced this week, would create a league in Eastern Oregon similar to the GOL of the early 2000s.

Under the proposal, GOL members La Grande, Baker and Ontario, all 4A schools, would join a 4A/3A hybrid special district for football with Class 3A Eastern Oregon League teams Nyssa, Vale and Burns.

McLoughlin, which played an independent schedule this fall, would also be in the proposed seven-team hybrid district, as it is moving down to 3A for football beginning in 2020. Current EOL teams Umatilla and Irrigon are set to move down to 2A starting next year.

"I'm excited that we're not in a three-team league anymore (if this passes)," head coach Rich McIlmoil said. "All of us (GOL coaches) decided we did not like playing each other twice each year."

Since Oregon's shift to a six-class system beginning in the 2006-07

school year, the GOL had been a four-team league — and this fall was forced to be a three-team entity when McLoughlin went independent.

"The (ad hoc) group supports this new league configuration as it addresses the league size issue immediately and provides an opportunity to demonstrate that mixed classifications within a single district can be viable," OSAA's update on Monday's ad hoc committee meeting said.

The move — if the ad hoc committee sets it as its final recommendation to the OSAA executive board Jan. 22 and it's subsequently approved Feb. 10 by the OSAA — will help resolve the biggest issue that has plagued the GOL the past 14 years: the lack of teams, which has often forced league members to scramble to find nonleague opponents.

La Grande athletic director Darren Goodman said his preferred choice for a league setup is different from the seven-team proposal, but he believes it would create a competitive league.

"Ideally I would like a six-team league with all 4A schools, but that's not really available right now," Goodman said. "Their other proposal was a five-team league.... I think (the hybrid is) OK. Geographically it makes sense."

The prior proposal Goodman referred to was a five-team special district in 4A

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■ How Madras helped get the hybrid to the OSAA

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The idea for a 4A/3A hybrid football district between the Greater Oregon League and the Eastern Oregon League was presented Monday to the OSAA football ad hoc committee by the athletic director of a school that hasn't had any ties to the GOL for 25 years.

Madras AD Evan Brown proposed the idea to the committee at its public meeting after a conference call late last week with the GOL's athletic directors and follow-up discussions with Baker AD Buell Gonzales Jr.

The prior proposal by the ad hoc committee was going to have Brown's White Buffaloes in league with Baker, La Grande, Ontario and Crook County, and would have resulted in the team facing several lengthy trips from Central Oregon to the east side, or from the east-side schools to Madras.

Brown told The Observer that Madras moved out of the GOL for the same reasons in 1994, and he presented the OSAA with data on the impact travel to the east side would have for his team versus staying in a league closer to home.

"People (on the west side) don't understand how far it is to the east side of the state of Oregon," Brown said.

The trip between Madras and Ontario, a

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Union rolls in Christmas Classic opener

Observer staff

UNION — Keegan Glenn scored 25 points Thursday to lead the Union boys basketball team to an easy 55-27 win over Dayville/Monument at the Union Christmas Classic.

Jace Phillips and Cole McLean each added eight points for Union, which pulled away after a tight first quarter, using a 16-1 second-quarter run to take a 28-12 halftime lead and control of the game.

The Bobcats (5-1 overall) face Jordan Valley Friday in the tournament semifinals. **Also at the Union Christmas Classic: MUSTANGS GET PAST HUSKIES**

The Elgin Huskies fell

Prep Basketball Roundup

short Thursday in their first game in Union against the Jordan Valley Mustangs, 45-35.

Kaden McClure led the way with 12 points and hit three 3-pointers for Elgin. Corbin Remington added six points.

The Huskies (2-4 overall) faced Dayville/Monument Friday in the consolation semifinals.

COUNCIL TOPS BADGERS
The Powder Valley Badgers saw their five-game winning streak end Thursday with a 67-58 loss to the Council Lumberjacks.

Dominick Grendel led three players in double

figures with 16 points. Roper Bingham added 14 and Reece Dixon scored 11.

The Lumberjacks outscored the Badgers 40-26 in the second and third quarters to break an early tie and build a 52-38 lead after three quarters. The Badgers scored 20 in the fourth, but fell short.

The Badgers (5-2 overall) faced Cove Friday in the consolation semifinals.

COVE FALLS TO CRANE

The Cove Leopards were taken down by the Crane Mustangs Thursday, 55-28. Patrick Frisch led the Leopards with 17 points, and Riley Lindsey added six.

Cove took an 18-17 lead into the locker room at halftime, but the Mustangs

used an effective full-court press to turn the game, and led 36-21 after three.

Cove (1-5 overall) faced Powder Valley Friday in the consolation semifinals.

GIRLS CHRISTMAS CLASSIC: BADGERS SLIP BY COUNCIL

Autumn Davis scored 17 points Thursday as the Powder Valley Badgers held on for a 38-33 win over the Council Lumberjacks.

Dallee Jo Bingham added seven points for the Badgers in the win, which ended a two-game losing streak.

Powder Valley had a slim 17-14 halftime lead and was still up just three after three quarters, but held on. The Badgers were 6-for-7 from the free-throw line in the

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Photo by Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group

La Grande's Blaine Shaw was a first-team all-state wide receiver and defensive back.

