

The Observer’s top 10 sports stories of 2019

10 — EOU men’s soccer clinches first-ever NAIA national bid

Midway through the season, it seemed as if the Eastern Oregon University men’s soccer team wouldn’t even make it to the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament.

But the Mountaineers got hot at the right time, winning their final five regular-season matches to clinch a bid to the CCC tourney on the final weekend of the regular season.

Then, they did themselves one better — winning back-to-back shootouts to reach the NAIA national tournament for the first time.

The Mountaineers tied their opponent in the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament in Springfield on consecutive days and won both shootouts to advance, first beating Oregon Tech in penalty kicks Nov. 12, 4-3, after the teams played to a scoreless tie. The next day, EOU battled to a 2-2 draw against Southern Oregon semifinals, then turned a perfect effort in the penalty kick round to win it 5-4 and reach the championship match against top-seed Corban and qualify for nationals for the first time.

All five players who took the penalty kicks for EOU — Javier Moran, Joaquin Bermejillo, Jack Rose, Elvis Pavan and Erik Mattice — were true on their attempts, with the final tally from Mattice serving as the winner.

Eastern dropped the championship match to Corban, 2-1, and a week later fell in its match at national, 2-0, to Baker (Kansas). The season, though, still was an unprecedented one for the Mountaineers, who a year earlier had won their first CCC tournament game.

9 — EOU women’s soccer completes best-ever run, reaches NAIA quarterfinals

The Eastern Oregon University women’s soccer team continued to make history in 2019, as for the first time, the Mountaineers advanced to the NAIA quarterfinals.

Josee Bassett connected on the winning penalty kick, and the Mountaineers topped No. 4 Central Methodist (Missouri) in a shootout, 4-3, Dec. 2 during the second round of the NAIA national championship tournament after the teams played to a 1-1 draw in regulation.

The Mountaineers’ magical run ended two days later in the quarterfinals to eventual national runner-up Marian (Indiana), but EOU posted another historic season with its best-ever playoff run, a win total (16) that tied for second-most in program history, and a preseason run that saw Eastern earn its highest-ever national ranking at sixth. EOU fell from the poll midseason, but surged

back to 10th following the conclusion of the season.

8 — Powder Valley volleyball, girls basketball take second

It didn’t end the way they hoped.

But the Powder Valley Badgers left the Class 1A state volleyball tournament with one of the best finishes in program history.

For the second year in a row, though, St. Paul got the best of Powder Valley in a matchup of 1A volleyball powerhouses.

The Buckaroos used a big run in each set and an 18-kill performance by Isabelle Wyss to top the Badgers Nov. 9, 25-13, 25-14, 25-16, in the 1A championship match in Redmond.

The loss dropped the Badgers (34-2 overall) to second place for the second year in a row and fifth time in program history.

It was the second time in 2019 St. Paul kept Powder Valley from a state title. In March, the teams met for the 1A girls basketball championship, which the Buckaroos won, 49-32. The Badgers finished the basketball season with a record of 26-4, taking second in the state for the third time in program history.

7 — Joseph boys track team takes second, girls take third

When he was a freshman, Tyler Homan was the lone member of the Joseph Eagles boys track and field team to qualify for the state track meet, and he did so in the 1A boys 3,000.

Three years later, Homan came off the track at Western Oregon University in Monmouth as an individual champion in the 1A boys 300 hurdles — and, more important, as part of the best finish the Eagles have ever had.

Boosted by Homan’s win in the hurdles, an effort in the pole vault that saw three Eagles reach the podium and two additional top-three finishes, Joseph scored 48 points May 17-18 to take second place at the 1A state meet, a mere five points behind state champion Dufur.

The Joseph girls, meanwhile, earned three wins to claim third place behind only Adrian and St. Paul.

Ellyse Tingelstad claimed two of the Eagles’ three individual state titles. She won her family’s fifth consecutive title in the 1A girls 3,000 — her older sister, Isabelle, won three in a row and Ellyse has now won two — and repeated as champion in the 1A girls 1,500 to help lift the Eagles. Ella Coughlan also added a state championship in the 800.

6 — Union/Cove takes second in both boys and girls cross country

In a pair of strong performances at the 2019 OSAA Cross Country State Championship Nov. 9, Union/Cove’s girls and boys teams both brought home



Eastern Oregon University’s Anna Hager (23) and Carroll College’s McKenna Payne (4) make a play on a corner kick Oct. 4 during a match. The Mountaineers turned in their best season ever in 2019, reaching the national quarterfinals.

second-place trophies from Lane Community College in Eugene.

In the 3A/2A/1A girls championship, the Bobcats finished with 110 points in a distant second from state champion Burns, which won with 43 points. Catlin Gabel was third and Bandon was fourth with 121 and 122 points, respectively.

Union/Cove bested Bandon by just six points for second place in the 2A/1A boys race, finishing with 89 points overall. St. Stephens Academy ran away with the state title, finishing with 42 points and placing three in the top five.

5 — Wallowa County cross country finally bests Burns, wins state

Wallowa County had been chasing Burns all year.

A year ago, Burns beat Wallowa County by two points to narrowly took home the 3A cross country state championship.

Last week, the Hilanders won the Special District 3 championship over the Outlaws by way of tiebreaker after each team scored 32 points.

At Lane Community College on Saturday, Wallowa County finally overtook Burns, winning the 2019 OSAA 3A Cross Country State Championship as a team by three points, while sophomore Henry Coughlan took home the individual title with a time of 15 minutes, 58.9 seconds.

“With such a young team, they don’t run young,” Outlaws coach Dan Moody said. “It was in their mind the whole time, ‘we got to step up, we got to step up.’ And they all did.”

The state title is the third in program history and the first since winning back-to-back in 1995 and 1996. All three have come under Moody.

While Coughlan led the way and finished four sec-



Eastern Oregon University goalkeeper Max Rose leaps for a ball during an Oct. 5 match against University of Providence. Rose and the Mountaineers dropped this match but used a late-season seven-match unbeaten streak to reach the NAIA national tournament for the first time.



onds ahead of second-place finisher J.P. Friedrichsen, his teammates weren’t far behind. Sophomores Zac Knapp and Bayden Menton were third and fourth with personal-bests of 16:07.1 and 16:23.8, respectively.

All seven Outlaw runners finished inside the top 30, but the difference on Saturday was John Paul Matthews and Ian Goodrich, who together outkicked Creswell’s Brandon Moehlmann and Taft’s Matias Vesma to finish 15th and 16th, respectively.

Happy New Year!

Thank you from your

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