

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — On paper, the La Grande Tigers appear to have the best wrestling team in Class 4A and, one could argue, a team among the best in Oregon regardless of classification.

The Tigers were ranked No. 1 in the most recent OSAA 4A coaches poll, on Jan. 8, and since that poll came out have picked up dual victories against the three teams directly below them in the rankings — No. 4 Baker on Jan. 8 (61-7), No. 3 Tillamook on Jan. 18 (66-16) and No. 2 Sweet Home on Jan. 18 (45-19). Those last two duals came in the semifinals and finals of the Oregon Classic in Redmond, which LHS won for the first time.

Those dual wins also come against teams who finished No. 1 (Tillamook), No. 2 (Sweet Home) and No. 4 (Baker) in last year’s OSAA state tournament. La Grande was right in there among them at third.

The team’s success has extended beyond Oregon. The Tigers, who also dominated their home Muilenburg tournament in December, have top-10 finishes this in three major tournaments in the West — Tri-State in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho (ninth), the Sierra Nevada Classic in Reno (fifth) and the Rolлие Lane Invite in Nampa, Idaho (sixth). At the most recent of those tournaments, Rolлие Lane, they were the highest-ranked Oregon team and finished ahead of programs such as Crook County (ranked second in 5A) and Mountain View (ranked fourth in 6A). The only Oregon teams to finish higher than La Grande in a tournament were Crook County at Tri-State and Sprague (No. 3 in 6A) at Sierra Nevada. The Tigers have not yet wrestled



Photo by Klel Carson

The La Grande wrestling team poses with the trophy earned for winning the Oregon Classic.

Tigers rolling at midway point

in a tournament that includes Newberg (No. 1 in 6A), Roseburg (No. 2 in 6A) or Crescent Valley (No. 1 in 5A), but they will get an opportunity to Jan. 31 and Feb. 1 at the Reser’s Tournament of Champions in Hillsboro. La Grande head coach Klel Carson said he believed the team, which in late February will be contending for its first state title since 1996, was capable of achieving the success it has had to this point in the season. “These kids have worked really hard for a long time,” Carson said. “They’re receiving their rewards for the hard work they put in.” Carson said the group of wrestlers is a team that

doesn’t settle or rest on its laurels, even coming off a weekend when it won what he said many in Oregon consider the dual state championship at the Oregon Classic. “That’s kind of the nature of the kids and who they are,” he said. “They’re the kind of kids who don’t want to settle for mediocrity. They know what it takes to be successful. They want to put in the work. They understand they gotta work hard. They’ve been successful in the past.” About 15 wrestlers on the team recently tasted the success of a state title, as they were members of the varsity football team’s undefeated

season and state championship run in November. The momentum carried into the wrestling season. “Once you have success, it builds confidence,” Carson said. The team is among the deepest, if not the deepest Carson has coached in more than two decades with the program.

“This year the greatest strength is all of the kids (are) solid all the way through,” he said. “There are not really any weak weights.” That strength, Carson said, will prove to be a major asset as the team nears the state tournament, which is Feb. 28-29 in Portland. Even with the balance across the weight classes,

one of the team’s best assets is an upper weight group Carson said is the best he’s coached, and it may be among the best ever in program history. The group includes last year’s state champions Parker Robinson and Chris Woodworth, past state runners-up Nathan Reed and Spencer Gerst, and third-place finisher Gabe Shukle. Carson said the top five weight classes, — 170 pounds to 285 pounds — “are the strongest we’ve had in my time for sure,” Carson said, adding he’s discussed with former LHS coach Verl Miller where this group ranks all-time. “Verl and I talked about it a lot. We can say for sure it’s been a long time since we’ve had upper weights like that.” But with all the expectation surrounding the team, which has hopes of ending the 24-year championship drought, Carson said he has not addressed pursuing the title with the team. “Never. I’ve never talked about that one time,” he said. “All my talks (are) about being good people and good citizens. I try never to talk about, let’s win a state title.” Instead, he pushes an ideal that will carry the wrestlers long after they step off the mat for the last time. “At the end of the day no matter what happens in wrestling, they’re great kids. They’re going to be great people in our community,” he said. “They’re going to make a difference in the world.”

Huskies’ win streak at seven

Observer staff

Tymra Anderson singlehandedly outscored Griswold Tuesday as she finished with 19 points as the Elgin Huskies girls basketball team routed the Grizzlies on the road, 54-15, for their seventh win in a row. Jayden and Jocelyn Palmer added 13 and 11 points, respectively, to join Anderson in double figures. The Huskies scored 18 points in the second quarter to push ahead 24-8 at halftime and take control. Elgin (11-2 overall, 3-0 Old Oregon League) host Nixyaawii Friday. **Union 54, Pilot Rock 5:** Callie Glenn scored 12 points, Brianna Kohr added 11 and the Bobcats easily topped Pilot Rock in a road Blue Mountain Conference contest. Glenn scored more points in the first quarter (seven) than the Rockets did the entire night as Union raced out to a 16-1 lead after one and coasted from there. In all, eight players scored for the Bobcats, who held Pilot Rock to just two field goals on the night. Union (15-3 overall, 5-0 BMC) hosts Weston-McEwen Friday. **Enterprise 44, Weston-McEwen 27:** The Outlaws used a balanced attack on offense as 11 players scored in their home win over Weston-McEwen in Blue Mountain Conference play. Rilyn Kirkland led Enterprise, which took a 12-1 first-quarter lead and never looked back, with nine points. Casidee Harrod added seven points for the Outlaws, who were never threatened. The TigerScots hurt their own chances to stay in the game by missing 23 free throws. Enterprise (12-2 overall, 4-1 BMC) hosts Grant Union Friday. **Powder Valley 52, Pine Eagle 32:** Keanna Bingham scored 20 points and hit three 3-pointers Monday as the Badgers routed Pine Eagle on the road in Old Oregon League action. Powder Valley used a press to fluster the Spartans and race out to an 18-2 lead. The Badgers settled for a 26-17 lead at the half, then extended the lead back to 17 after three. Autumn Davis added 10 points and Josi Krieger grabbed 10 rebounds for Powder Valley (7-6 overall, 3-1 OOL), which hosts

Joseph Friday in an important OOL contest. **Boys** **Elgin 60, Griswold 48:** Gage McKay scored 12 points Tuesday to lead four players in double figures as the Huskies used a balanced attack to get past Helix on the road in Old Oregon League play. Wyatt Hallgarth and Ian Adams added 11 points apiece for Elgin, and Tristan Simpson scored 10 points. Elgin outscored the Grizzlies in each quarter to slowly pull away for the win. The Huskies (8-5 overall, 3-0 OOL) host Nixyaawii Friday in a battle of teams unbeaten in OOL play. **Pilot Rock 47, Union 45:** The Bobcats’ rally from a nine-point deficit entering the fourth quarter Tuesday fell just short as they dropped their second Blue Mountain Conference road game in a row. Union chipped away at a 39-30 hole and had a chance late, but was unable to cash in on opportunities down the stretch and Keegan Glenn’s potential winning 3-pointer at the buzzer was off. Glenn finished with 18 points to lead Union, and Cole McLean added eight points. The Bobcats (11-7 overall, 2-3 BMC) host Weston-McEwen Friday. **Powder Valley 77, Pine Eagle 68:** Ethan Stephens scored 26 points and hit six 3-pointers Monday as the Badgers held off Pine Eagle on the road in a high-scoring Old Oregon League battle. Stephens had 11 during a 29-point second quarter for Powder Valley as it went into the half ahead 46-41. Reece Dixon and Dominick Grende, who added 17 and 16 points, respectively, led the way in the second half with a combined 17 points as the Badgers held on. Moziess Nesser added 12 points for Powder Valley (12-3 overall, 4-0 OOL), which hosts Joseph Friday in a key league battle. **Weston-McEwen 49, Enterprise 47:** The Outlaws dropped their fourth Blue Mountain Conference game in a row, this time falling at home to a TigerScot squad that was winless in BMC action. Stats were not provided for Enterprise (5-7 overall, 1-4 BMC), which hosts Grant Union Friday.



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