Staff photo by Ronald Bond

Elgin senior Jayden Palmer (1) reaches for a rebound Saturday in the Huskies' game against Imbler. Palmer and the Huskies are off to an 11-2 start this season and are in the midst of their best season in nearly 20 years.

Reaching new heights

Elgin girls hoops off to best start in nearly 20 years

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

ELGIN — Not a single member of the current Elgin Huskies girls basketball team was alive the last time the program had a record above .500.

The year was 2001. George W. Bush was in his first year as president. The Sept. 11 attacks had yet to happen. Gas was a mere $1.48 per gallon.

That season, the Huskies finished with a record of 13-9 and fell one win short of a berth in the 2A state tournament.

Elgin has been mired in struggles on the court ever since. Only twice after that season has Elgin finished with a record of .500, going 11-11 the following season in 2001-02, and 12-12 in 2006-07.

The Huskies' current winning streak of seven games surpasses win totals in five of those seasons, and this season appears to be on a much different trajectory. Tuesday's 54-15 win over Griswold moved the team's record to 11-2 and gave Elgin a 3-0 mark in the Old Oregon League, which is the top mark in the OOL. Elgin is one victory away from guaranteeing a winning record and two wins shy of matching the 13 victories set by the 2000-01 team.

"It gives me so much inspiration to look back on where we started from my freshman year till now," said Tymra Anderson, one of two seniors on the squad. "It truly makes me believe anything can happen if we want it to. We can connect and work together. We can accomplish a goal."

Staff photo by Ronald Bond

Maddie Larman, left, and the Elgin Huskies are first in the Old Oregon League.

Elgin had already seen improvement from the 2016-17 season when Anderson and Jayden Palmer, EHS's other senior, were freshmen. That team won just four games, and Anderson admitted the players carried a mindset onto the court — likely the results of the previous years' struggles — that left them defeated even before tipoff.

"Our big thing was our mentality," she said. "We went into games feeling helpless because we knew we were going to lose, and we lacked the players and the skills. We struggled with it. My sophomore year was kind of the same way. The mentality was not a winning mentality. And we did struggle. We had that negative mentality."

Palmer said many of the players on the team, as a result, would show up but didn't seek to win.

"Freshman year, honestly, (was) very negative," she said. "Nobody cared about winning, nobody cared about playing. They were just there to do this."

Palmer added the players often heard that the other teams always assumed they would win whenever they played Elgin.

"We were the team that everybody

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Tiger wrestlers easily roll past Ontario

Observer staff

ONTARIO — Add Ontario to the list of teams thumped by the La Grande Tiger wrestling team.

The Tigers, the top-ranked team in Class 4A, won eight matches by fall Thursday as they rolled to a 64-12 dual victory in Ontario and overcame a slow beginning to the night, according to head coach Klel Carson.

"They were a little bit flat to start, but they started to get going and rolling," Carson said, adding the team was "flat" during warmups. "The little guys really wrestled well tonight and got us going."

Three straight pins by Rogan Willins (106 pounds), Brysen Peneloza (113) and Joshua Collins (120) pushed La Grande past the flat start and out to an 18-0 lead.

"It changes the mindset of everybody when the little guys go out there and get going," Carson said.

La Grande's lead reached 28-0 after a win by forfeit by Dominick Caratello (126) and a 10-1 major decision by Braden Carson (132). A pin by Braxton Bisenius (145) pushed the lead to 34-3 later and La Grande finished off with five wins to close the night — a win by forfeit by Parker Robinson (170) and pins by Nathan Reed (182), Christopher Woodworth (195), Spencer Gerst (220) and Gabe Shukle (285). The wins by Reed and Woodworth both took less than 45 seconds.

Observer file photo

La Grande's Nathan Reed, top, is shown Jan. 8 in a match against Baker. Reed needed just 22 seconds for a pinThursday as theTigers routed Ontario.

The Tigers are off until Jan. 31 when they compete in the Reser's Tournament of Champions in Hillsboro.

Civil War has reached epic heights

By Steve Gress
Corvallis Gazette-Times

CORVALLIS — Nine years ago Thursday, Scott Rueck led his Oregon State women's basketball program into the Civil War for the first time.

It also happened to the mark the grand opening of Matthew Knight Arena in Eugene, and a sellout crowd of 12,364 was on hand.

For Rueck, who had pieced together a team that season and had never coached in front of more than 2,000 or so people during his tenure at Division III George Fox, it was, in a word, "overwhelming."

And while the Beavers suffered an 81-72 setback, the eighth straight loss to start the then Pac-10 slate, Rueck remembers it as "being just an absolute blast," he said Tuesday afternoon.

"We played so hard," he recalled. "We weren't quite good enough to win that one but we played so hard and it was just so much fun. But I just remember being overwhelmed, honestly."

The Beavers and Ducks will renew their rivalry this Friday night at 7 p.m. in Matthew Knight Arena. While the game is once again sold out, that's about the only similarity from that game in 2011.

Neither the Beavers nor the Ducks were challengers in the conference that season let alone being in a position to win the conference and make the NCAA tournament — and go deep in the tourney to boot.

But when they square off Friday and then in Gill Coliseum Sunday at 1 p.m., it will be a matchup of the No. 4 (Oregon) and No. 7 (Beavers) teams in the country. Sunday's game is being televised on ESPN2.

Both games are sold out and tickets on the secondary market are going from a few hundred dollars to more than $1,000.

"Both programs have worked hard for a long time to get to this point where we're both top 10," Rueck said. "We both have high expectations for our years. We're both off to good starts, I mean we both would rather be a little bit better than we are right now even though we're both in pretty good positions.

"So there's a lot of attention, and that's fun, it's kind of what you dream of, to be in situations like this and to get to compete at the highest level and put a show on for a lot of people. And so it's all fun."

Oregon State may have lost that first Civil War, but it was not a precursor of things to come for Rueck and the Beavers.

A few weeks later, the Beavers overcame a 20-point halftime deficit at home to rally for a 61-59 win.

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Oregon gets by Trojans in 2OT

The Associated Press

EUGENE — Chris Duarte had 30 points and 11 rebounds, Payton Pritchard reached a Pac-12 milestone for career points, rebounds and assists, and No. 12 Oregon outlasted Southern California 79-70 in double overtime Thursday night.

With 24 points and seven assists, Pritchard became the first player in the Pac-12 to reach 1,500 career points, 600 assists and 500 rebounds. When the achievement was noted on the video scoreboard at Matthew Knight Arena in the second half, the crowd gave the senior guard a standing ovation.

Pritchard is just the sixth player in Pac-12 history with 1,500 points and 600 assists, joining Oregon State's Gary Payton, Arizona's Damon Stoudamire and Jason Gardner, USC's Jordan McLaughlin and UCLA's Tyus Edney.

Duarte also had eight steals, one shy of the school record.

Oregon (16-4, 5-2) led by 11 in the second half but USC rallied with a 17-2 run to take a 62-58 lead, capped by Jonah Mathews' 3-pointer with 1:24 left.

C.J. Walker and Pritchard hit consecutive layups to tie it at 62 and send the game to overtime.

Pritchard's 3-pointer in the first extra period gave the Ducks a 65-64 lead, but Ethan Anderson's layup and free throw put the Trojans up by two. Duarte made free throws for the Ducks to tie it again, and Mathews and Pritchard both missed shots down the stretch.

Duarte and Pritchard each made free throws that gave Oregon a four-point advantage to open the second overtime. Duarte's 3-pointer put the Ducks up 74-68, and USC couldn't catch up.

Onyeka Okongwu had 23 points and 14 rebounds for the Trojans (15-4, 4-2).

Oregon was coming off a 64-61 overtime win at Washington last weekend. The Ducks overcame a 16-point deficit and won it on Pritchard's 3-pointer with 3.4 seconds left. But Oregon lost to Washington State 72-61 last Thursday, resulting in a fall from No. 8 to No. 12 in the AP Top 25.

Beavers fall to UCLA

CORVALLIS — With the game in the balance, UCLA's Chris Smith wasn't about to settle for perimeter jumpers.

The 6-foot-9 guard scored nine of his 15 points down the stretch, leading UCLA to a 62-58 victory over Oregon State on Thursday night.

Smith's 3-point play with 4:23 remaining put the Bruins (10-9, 3-3 Pac-12) in

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