NBA icon Kobe Bryant among nine dead in helicopter crash

By Stefanie Dazio
The Associated Press

CALABASAS, California — NBA legend Kobe Bryant, his daughter and seven others were killed Sunday when their helicopter plunged into a steep hillside in dense morning fog in Southern California, his sudden death at age 41 touching off an outpouring of grief for a star whose celebrity transcended basketball.

The chopper went down in Calabasas, about 30 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles. Authorities said nine people were aboard and presumed dead. Bryant, an all-time basketball great who spent his entire 20-year career with the Los Angeles Lakers, was among the victims, a person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press.

Bryant's 13-year-old daughter, Gianna, also was killed, a different person familiar with the case said.

Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva would not confirm the identities of the victims Sunday pending official word from the coroner.

"God bless their souls," Villanueva said at a news conference.

The cause of the crash was unknown.

News of the charismatic superstar's death rocketed around the sports and entertainment worlds, with many taking to Twitter to register their shock, disbelief and anguish.

"Words can't describe the pain I am feeling. I loved Kobe — he was like a little brother to me," retired NBA great Michael Jordan said. "We used to talk often, and I will miss those conversations very much. He was a fierce competitor, one of the greats of the game and a creative force."

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EOU roughs up SOU

Staff photo by Ronald Bond

Eastern Oregon University's Jane Nelson, left, gets tangled up with Southern Oregon's Dominique Harding during Saturday's game at Quinn Coliseum. The Mountaineers routed the Raiders 75-53 for their fifth win in a row.

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Three weeks ago, Eastern Oregon University women's basketball coach Anji Weissenfluh said her team was still searching for its identity.

It appears the Mountaineers have found it.

The suddenly sizzling Mounties ran their winning streak to five games in a row after defeating Oregon Tech Friday, 61-51, and blasting Southern Oregon Saturday, 75-53, in a pair of Cascade Collegiate Conference home games.

"They played hard this weekend," Weissenfluh said. "I thought our defense and rebounding was outstanding. We gave up some points in the fourth quarter (on Saturday), but our defense and rebounding was as tough as it's been all year, so it started there. We had people step up."

EOU had dropped to 3-3 in the CCC after back-to-back home losses to Northwest Christian and Corban that left the Mountaineers in the

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LHS girls survive scare from Mac-Hi at home, 62-53

Staff photo by Ronald Bond

La Grande's Lauran Rinker, right, attempts a layup Friday during the Tigers' home game against McLoughlin.

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A much-improved McLoughlin Pioneer squad gave the La Grande girls basketball team a major scare Friday night.

"They're way, way, way, way, way better. We watched them at the Banks tournament a couple of times, and they're winning games," LHS head coach Brian Wright said of the Pioneers. "We started out slow, and we allowed them to believe they can hang with us."

La Grande, though, scored the final five points of the game at the free-throw line to secure a 62-53

Prep girls hoops

Greater Oregon League win at home after a 13-point fourth quarter lead was whittled down to just four in the final minute.

La Grande seemed to be in command midway through the final quarter when Ella Dunlap, who scored a game-high 18 points, twice pushed the Tigers' margin to 13 points, the last time at 55-42.

What followed was a wild final few minutes that saw a flurry of turnovers, two technical fouls and physical play both ways as the Pioneers — as they did each

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Mounties split with No. 5 OIT, No. 15 SOU

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Eastern Oregon University men's basketball team picked up easily its biggest win of the season Friday at home, but then followed with perhaps its most gut-wrenching loss.

The Mountaineers led nearly the entire night Friday and held on for an 87-84 victory over fifth-ranked Oregon Tech, then saw a late rally Saturday against No. 15 Southern Oregon fall just short in a 77-73 setback.

"We came into this weekend knowing we had to get two at home," said Max McCullough, who had 31 points Friday but was limited to 15 Saturday. "We had two good teams coming in, but we felt we should have beat them both. This one hurts. We didn't play quite like we did (Friday) night. We kind of let it slip away there at the end. It hurts, but we gotta come back next week and focus."

EOU, which entered the weekend with a 3-6 record in the Cascade Collegiate Conference, led nearly wire-to-wire Friday against the Hustlin' Owls and simply couldn't miss. EOU shot 57% from the floor, 44% from 3-point range. McCullough was 12-for-17 shooting, and Jarek Schetzle, who added 15 points, was 7-for-9 from the floor.

McCullough hit a 3-pointer to cap a 13-0 run and give EOU its largest lead of the first half at 15-3. The Mountaineers built as much as a 17-point lead midway through the second half when McCullough had a basket and two free throws and Landon Jones, who added 15 points and 11 rebounds, also hit two from the charity stripe.

But OIT rallied. Lachlan McKimm's field goal with 4:30 to play trimmed the deficit to 71-63. The lead stayed between six and eight points until a Mitchell Fink field goal made it 81-76 and two free throws later cut the margin to just four with 24 seconds left. Fink, who led all scorers with 38 points, got the Owls as close as 85-84 with a 3-point play with nine seconds remaining, but Jones and McCullough each split a pair of three throws for the final margin.

Staff photo by Ronald Bond

Eastern Oregon University's Jamal Heckard dribbles up court Saturday during the Mountaineers' contest against Southern Oregon.

"They definitely made it interesting," McCullough said. "We got that lead, and that's been our kryptonite all season. We get a lead and we can't quite keep it. We knew they would fight back. They have one of the best players in the country in Mitchell Fink. We knew they were going to come back."

Josh Brown added 16 points for EOU. The Mountaineers top four scorers Friday — McCullough, Schetzle, Jones and Brown — combined to shoot 67%.

EOU and SOU traded the lead back and forth Saturday until the Raiders pulled ahead by 12 midway through the second half, 58-46, on an Aaron Borich 3-pointer. EOU got within 60-56 when Jamal Heckard canned back-to-back 3s from the top of the key to cap a 10-2 run, one he scored eight points during.

Tate Hoffman put the Raiders up 75-68 with three minutes left, but McCullough got loose for a 3-pointer to make it a four-point game, and a put-back by Jones cut the deficit to 75-73 with 47 seconds to go.

EOU got a stop on defense after SOU committed an offensive foul, and McCullough got a good look on a baseline runner for the tie with about six seconds left, but the short attempt rimmed out.

"It was kind of a broken play a little bit," McCullough said of the potential tying shot. "I went and got it, kind of fumbled it, (the defender) was riding me pretty good. I felt I got a pretty clean

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More records fall for EOU track

Observer staff

BOISE — Two more records were broken by the Eastern Oregon University women's track and field team over the weekend, as both Jasmine Devers and Megan Bolton set program marks in the 200 and 600, respectively, during the Ed Jacoby Invite in Boise.

Bolton won the 600 with a time of 1:33.61, breaking the program record in the race for the second week in a row. Devers came in fourth in the 200, and set the top mark in program history with a time of 25.18 seconds.

Also, Michelle Herbes took sixth in the 1,000 with a time of 2:58.88, Maggie Ledbetter was seventh in the shot put at 43 feet, 9-1/4 inches, and Paige Dodd was eighth in the high jump at 5-feet-1-1/4. The 4x400 relay team of Bolton, Megan Boals, and Michelle and Elizabeth Herbes, was fifth in 3:56.17.

Cody Milmine led seven top-eight performances on the men's side with a time of 7 seconds flat in the 60 for sixth and 22.25 in the 200 for seventh. He was also on the seventh-place 4x400 team along with Conner Young, Travis Running and Dustin Zimmerly in a time of 3:28.74.

Alex Navarro finished fifth in the 1,000 (2:30.48) and Allex Kosel was fifth in the triple jump (45-feet-10), and taking seventh was John Brown in the triple jump (44-feet-5-1/2), and Jonah Coats in the heptathlon (4,284 points). Coats' top disciplines in the event were the pole vault, where he was fifth with a mark of 13-feet-9-3/4, and the high jump, where he placed sixth at 15-feet-10-1/2.

EOU is off until the Jackson's/Nike Invite Feb. 7-8 back in Boise.