



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

Eastern Oregon University's Jordan Shaw throws to first base Tuesday during a practice on the turf at Community Stadium.

## Excitement and history collide in Super Bowl LIV

By Barry Wilner  
The Associated Press

MIAMI — Few Super Bowls in recent memory have appeared as competitive as the San Francisco 49ers against the Kansas City Chiefs.

No wonder there's a little more buzz about this one.

History and excitement are a nice combination for any championship game.

The history stems from the Chiefs seeking their first title since 1970, when they won the fourth Super Bowl in the final matchup of AFL-NFL. The full merger took place the next season — and Kansas City hasn't been back to the Super Bowl for which its founder, Lamar Hunt, provided the name.

"I think he would be amazed," said his son, Clark Hunt, who now oversees the Chiefs. "He and my mother actually talked about that at one of the last Super Bowls they attended together about 15 years ago. He said, 'I always knew it was going to be big, but I

didn't know it was going to be this big."

Then there's Andy Reid, whose NFL head coaching resume goes back to 1999 in Philadelphia. He has a Super Bowl ring from work as an assistant coach in Green Bay, but Reid is 0-1 in the big game.

"Just getting him here isn't the goal," star tight end Travis Kelce said. "Winning this thing for him is."

San Francisco is seeking its sixth Vince Lombardi Trophy, which would equal the record held by Pittsburgh and New England. The 49ers also are looking to be only the second team to go from 4-12 the previous season to the top of the heap.

"It's been quite a journey," said halfback Raheem Mostert, who himself has had quite the sojourn in the NFL. He was cut by seven teams and was a special-teamer for the 49ers before getting a chance — and taking off running with it. Mostert rushed for 220 yards and four touchdowns. See **Super Bowl** / Page 8A

## A new beginning

By Ronald Bond  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The 2020 season will be one of new beginnings for the Eastern Oregon University softball team.

Not only is the program under new management with Nicole Christian — one of the program's all-time great players and a highly successful head coach at McLoughlin — now at the helm, but more than half the roster is new, with 13 of the 25 players either incoming freshmen or junior college transfers.

"For the most part, they're all willing to buy in and want to change the program, and we've got a coaching staff that is excited to be here," Christian said. "We're about changing and making a difference in the community and at the school, and think we've got a great group to do that."

There's nowhere to go but up for the Mountaineers after they struggled through a 13-32 season in 2019 — posting the fewest wins in a season since going 12-22 in 2012 — and Christian has the winning know-how to help turn the program around. She played for EOU under Anji Weissenfuh during the best run in program history — including the team that finished fourth in the nation in 1999 — and guided Mac-Hi through an 11-year stretch that saw the program win 205 games, reach the playoffs all 11 years and claim two 4A state titles.

"She has a winning mentality, for sure," said Ashton Kazmierski, one of six returning seniors on the squad, adding the team is looking for a fresh start. "She's really big on competition, making sure we're always competing against ourselves and everyone else, and she doesn't like to lose, so that's really good to bring into the program."

Christian said the fact EOU lost just one returner during the coaching change from Erin Dickhausen to herself shows "these girls want to be a part of something, and they have faith the program's going to go in the right direction."

Part of righting the ship

involves shifting the culture and building the team's unity.

"Just playing together as a unit and everybody being on the same page and being here for the same reasons," senior infielder Payton Pocklington said of what's improved from a year ago. "I think this year we have really good team unity, and everyone on the field is here for the same reasons. We come here ready to work hard for the girl next to us every single day."

In the pitcher's circle, EOU has six arms it can turn to this spring, and Christian will employ a different approach with her pitchers than the Mountaineers have done in the past.

"We're at the level now you don't see a lot of pitchers go seven innings. We've got to find groups that work well together," she said. "I want three innings from you. I want four innings from you. I want two innings from you. And we have to work as a cohesive (unit) on the pitching staff to shut those hitters down."

She'll also have some pitchers who play in the field — at first base — and bat.

"They've just had pitchers pitch," Christian said, referring to what EOU has done in recent years. "We've got athletes, and I'm going to utilize those girls that can do multiple things."

Kazmierski, one of the pitchers, said she's excited about the mix within the pitching staff.

"We all complement each other really well, and we're each other's biggest hype-men. It's fun to be a part of a staff that appreciates each other so much," she said.

Kazmierski and Amanda Smith are EOU's top two returning pitchers, between them logging 140 innings, though they had a combined record of 5-18. They had nine complete games between them in 26 starts.

Sophomore Haley Ebner is the top returning batter for the Mountaineers, coming off a season that saw her hit .309 with four home runs and a team-leading 26 RBIs.

Though most of EOU's

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Staff photo by Ronald Bond

Eastern Oregon University's Amanda Smith delivers a pitch Tuesday.



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

Eastern Oregon University's Julie Hernandez settles under a fly ball Tuesday.

## Joseph boys rout Wallowa, win second straight



Photo by Ellen Morris Bishop/EO Media Group

Joseph's Chase Murray drives to the hoop Wednesday.

Observer staff

ENTERPRISE — Chase Murray and Hadley Miller scored 18 points apiece Wednesday, and the Joseph Eagles used a huge first half to pull away from Wallowa for a 67-37 Old Oregon League win.

Murray had 16 of his points during a 43-point first half for the Eagles as they raced out to a 43-17 halftime lead. The Eagles built a double-digit lead in the first quarter and never looked back.

Carson Littlepage added 10 for Joseph, which won its second in a row.

Tristin Bales had 11 points to lead Wallowa, while Zeb Hermens and Kolby Mandal had seven points apiece.

Joseph (12-5 overall, 3-2 OOL) faces Griswold Friday, while Wallowa (6-11, 2-5) hosts Elgin Friday.

**Girls**

**Joseph 39, Wallowa 38:** The Eagles built a

sizable fourth-quarter lead Wednesday in Enterprise, then had to hold on down the stretch to fend off Wallowa and stay undefeated in Old Oregon League action.

The game was tight throughout, and Wallowa held a 28-27 lead after three. Sabrina Albee scored eight points in the fourth quarter to help Joseph pull ahead, but Wallowa nearly got back into the game from the free-throw line. The Cougars were 8-of-12 from the stripe in the fourth, but fell just short.

Jamie Johnston led all scorers with 27 points for Wallowa, 17 of which came in the second half.

Madelyn Nelson scored 16 points — and 10 in the first half — to lead Joseph. Albee added 11 points.

The Eagles (12-5 overall, 5-0 OOL) visit Griswold Friday, while Wallowa (10-8, 5-2) hosts Elgin Friday.