

Tigers maul Special District 4, send 19 wrestlers to state

Observer staff

ONTARIO — Eleven district champions, 19 state tournament qualifiers and more than 500 points amassed.

Those were the totals compiled by the top-ranked La Grande wrestling team Friday and Saturday as the Tigers put on yet another show of domination, this time at the 4A Special District 4 wrestling tournament in Ontario.

“I’m not sure there’s ever been a team (with) 11 district champions,” LHS head coach Klel Carson said. “It was a great weekend by everybody. It was a really good team effort. The freshmen, everybody really stepped up and wrestled for their teammates.”

LHS finished with a total of 503.5 points as it easily won the team title, scoring close to 300 points more than runner-up Baker, which had 218 points.

La Grande won all but three of the weight classes and had at least a third-place finisher and state qualifier in the three weight classes it didn’t win. Top four finishers in each weight class earned a spot to state.

“It was a huge team effort — what do you say?” Carson said, noting the challenge of addressing all the success the team had. “We basically did a dual meet against our region and won all but three matches.”

Here’s a rundown of that success:



Observer file photo

Braden Carson, shown earlier this season, was one of 11 La Grande wrestlers to win a district title Saturday.

Brysen Penaloza won both his matches to take the crown at 106 pounds, defeating Ontario’s Froylan Santiago by a 13-4 major decision in the final.

The 113 champion was Joshua Collins, who pinned both his opponents, and needed just 1:23 to top Baker’s Caleb Shaw in the championship.

At 120, Dominick Caratello won four matches by fall, and pinned Baker’s Gavin Stone midway through the second round of the final to claim his district title.

Braden Carson was nearly as

dominant at 126, pinning three opponents to reach the title match and there defeating Baker’s Johnny Niehaus by a 16-1 technical fall.

Cole Isaacson won the 132 championship by going 3-0 and edged Ontario’s Ruben Hernandez by a 14-10 decision in the tournament’s highest-scoring final, battling back from a 10-1 deficit earlier in the match to earn the win.

Perhaps the best championship match was won by Braxton Bisenius at 145, who needed extra mat time to secure a 3-1 sudden victory

over Jake Eskew of Baker.

Parker Robinson had no issues at 170, as the defending state champion had three first-round pins to reach the final, where he earned an 8-0 major decision over Reece White of Madras.

Nathan Reed and Christopher Woodworth both eked out titles in the closest matches of the finals. Reed edged Baker’s Hon Rushton 4-3 at 182, and Woodworth, the defending state champion at 195, slipped by Madras’ Kody Zemke 3-2. Reed and Woodworth both won two matches by fall to reach the

championship.

Spencer Gerst took the 220 title, needing just 53 seconds to pin two opponents to reach the final, then taking first over teammate Lincoln Clark by forfeit. Clark, who placed second, won his only contested match by fall.

Gabe Shukle rounded out the championships for LHS going 4-0 with two pins and a win by injury default over Sisters’ Damien King in the final.

Earning third to claim state berths were Rogan Willins, who was 3-1 at 106; Alex Kehr, who shook off a quarterfinal loss to win four in a row and finish with a 5-1 record at 138; Wyatt Livingston, who finished 4-1 at 145; Ryan Stubblefield, who won his last three matches to go 4-1 at 152; Brody MacMillan, who was 3-1 at 160; and Lamar Ward, who won four in a row to finish 4-1 at 182.

Casey Cornford placed fourth at 170 to also claim a state berth, going 3-2 and winning the fourth-place match against Amin Qouchbane of Corbett by fall to earn his state bid.

The Tigers will be among the favorites to contend for a state title Friday and Saturday when they head to the 4A state wrestling tournament in Portland.

“It should be a lot of fun this weekend,” Klel Carson said. “(If) the kids continue to work hard, stay healthy, we’re in a good spot.”

Eastern women turned away as NCU wins title

Observer staff

EUGENE — The Eastern Oregon University women’s basketball team took a lead into the fourth quarter of Saturday’s Cascade Collegiate Conference title-deciding matchup at Northwest Christian and led by as much as 10 points in the final quarter, but a 22-4 run by the Beacons turned the tables as they downed EOU 74-66 to claim the CCC championship outright and the conference’s first automatic bid to the NAIA national tournament.

Eastern took a 53-48 lead into the fourth, and quickly extended the margin to 10 points on a field goal by Jill Albright and a 3-pointer by Taylor Stricklin, who led the Mountaineers with 15 points.

NCU rattled off 12 of the next 16 points to get within 62-60 with less than five minutes to play, and Dani Harley’s 3-pointer with 4:07 remaining gave NCU the lead for good. Aspen Slifka followed with a 3-point play, and four free throws extended the NCU lead to 70-62 with less than a minute to go.

The Mountaineers trailed nearly the entire first half and were down 35-32 at the break, but rallied to pull ahead 47-45 on a basket by Jane Nelson with 2:55 to play in the third. Alyssa Kuskie gave NCU the lead back with a 3-pointer, but Stricklin and Whitney Meyer both hit treys in the final minute to put EOU up five after three and start an 11-0 run that gave Eastern its largest lead.

Rachel Fielder added 13 points and Jane Nelson had 12, while Emma Logan had team bests of 10 rebounds and four assists.

EOU (21-9 overall, 15-5 CCC), which earned the No. 2 seed into the CCC tournament, hosts College of Idaho Tuesday in the conference quarterfinals.

EOU men top Beacons for fifth in CCC

EUGENE — The Eastern Oregon University men’s basketball team earned the No. 5 seed in the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament and guaranteed itself a winning season Saturday with an 82-71 road win over Northwest Christian.

The Mountaineers, who never trailed, had five players finish in double figures, with Max McCullough scoring a game-high 24 points. Jamal Heckard added 17 points, seven assists and was 5-for-9 from 3-point range. Landon Jones scored 14 points, Jarek Schetzle had 12 points and 14 rebounds and Andreas Brown added 10 points.

Eastern scored the game’s first eight points to force an early timeout. The Beacons battled to briefly tie the score at 27-27, but Zane Wright’s 3-pointer gave EOU the lead back, and the Mountaineers took a 44-36 lead into the half.

Jones’ basket at the 16:08 mark of the second half put Eastern ahead by 11, and EOU built as much as a 17-point lead, going ahead 70-53 on Jones’ field goal with nine minutes to play. The Beacons got within three with two minutes to go, but Schetzle scored with 1:53 remaining to start a game-ending 8-0 run.

EOU (16-13 overall, 10-10 CCC) travels Wednesday to Kirkland, Washington, to face Northwest in the quarterfinals of the CCC tourney.

Five Mounties punch national ticket

■ EOU men’s wrestling squad claims fourth in CCC as four take third place

Observer staff

ATHERTON, Calif. — Four members of the Eastern Oregon University men’s wrestling team took third place Friday and Saturday in their weight classes and were among five Mountaineers who punched tickets to the NAIA national tournament as EOU placed fourth at the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament.

Eastern had a wrestler from each of the top five weight classes reach nationals, as Keegan Mulhill (174 pounds), Marco Retano (184), Ryan Redford (197) and Noel Orozco (285) all placed third.

Mulhill, Redford and Orozco all reached the semifinals. Mulhill dropped his match in the semis to eventual second-place finisher Levi Perry of Corban by a 7-3 decision, but defeated both Chase Short of MSU-Northern (6-5) and Armon Fayyazi (11-8) by decision to finish third.

Redford dropped a close 5-2 decision to Providence’s John Hensley in the semis, then bounced back to take two close decisions for third, edging Menlo’s Afton Silvis, 5-2, and Simpson’s Jacob Gonzalves, 5-4.

Orozco lost by fall to Life Pacific’s Antonio Dacosta in his semi match, but followed with pins over Menlo’s Elias Kenneryd and Embry-Riddle’s Garrette Branson for third. Orozco won three matches by fall on the weekend.

Retano bounced back from losing his first match to Simpson’s Bryce Decamargo by a 14-7 decision to win four in a row and claim third. His comeback included a 6-4 sudden victory over Hayden Schrull of Providence in the consolation semifinals and a 9-5 decision over Oliver Myers of Embry-Riddle in the third-place match.

Also earning a national bid was Josh Pine, who took fourth at 165. Pine, like Retano, dropped his quarterfinal match — Pine by a 6-0 decision to Embry-Riddle’s Taylor Owens — then went on a tear, pinning three opponents in a row to reach the third-place match. He took down Menlo’s Jesus Zamorano, Arizona Christian’s Lano Luna, and MSU-Northern’s Nakoda Siegel along the way.

Also placing for EOU were Blake McNall, who went 2-2 at 141 to finish fifth, and John Bittinger, who finished 3-3 at 157 for sixth.

EOU scored 96 points as a team, finishing behind Menlo, Embry-Riddle and Providence.

The NAIA national championship tournament is March 6-7 in Wichita, Kansas.

LOCAL SCHEDULE

Tuesday
WOMEN’S COLLEGE BASKETBALL
Cascade Collegiate Conference quarterfinals
College of Idaho at Eastern Oregon, 7 p.m.
PREP GIRLS HOOPS 1A state playoffs, first round
Elgin at Echo, 6 p.m.
Jordan Valley at Powder Valley, 6 p.m.

Wednesday
WOMEN’S COLLEGE BASKETBALL
Cascade Collegiate Conference quarterfinals
Eastern Oregon at Northwest, Kirkland, Washington, 7 p.m.
PREP BOYS HOOPS 1A state playoffs, first round
Elgin at South Wasco County, 6 p.m.
Jordan Valley at Joseph, Enterprise, 6:30 p.m.

— Subject to change

EOU softball splits with UP

Observer staff

PENDLETON — The Eastern Oregon University softball team split the second day of its series against University of Providence Saturday in Pendleton, dropping the weekend’s final Cascade Collegiate Conference game of the set, 10-1, before winning a nonconference game, 5-3.

After getting swept in Friday’s doubleheader, the Argos stormed out to a five-run first-inning lead, led 7-1 after three and rolled to a five-inning victory.

Two errors, two walks and five stolen bases helped Providence score two early runs without a hit before RBI doubles from Taylor Mathews, Hanna Tarum and Sam Hernandez extended the margin to 5-0.

The lead reached 7-0 before Haley Ebner got the Mountaineers on the board with an RBI single in the third inning, but Eastern failed to generate any more offense, leaving two runners on base to end the fourth and the bases loaded in the fifth.

EOU had five hits, two of which came from Ebner. Amanda Smith pitched into the third inning, allowing seven runs on seven hits with two walks and three strikeouts.

In the finale, the Mountaineers grabbed an early 5-0 lead, then stopped the Argos’ late rally to secure their third win.

EOU scored three runs in the first and only had one hit, using four walks and several wild pitches to plate three runs and go ahead

3-0. Jordan Henley followed with an RBI single in the second and Shelby Starr cracked an RBI single in the third.

Mathews’ RBI double in the sixth, a McKenzie Staats home run in the seventh and an error in the seventh allowed the Argos to get back in the game, but Brianna Zwegardt got the final two outs for EOU for her second save of the season.

Abby Giles earned the win, going 6-1/3 innings and allowing three runs on six hits with three walks and three strikeouts. Henley led the offense with two hits.

EOU (3-11 overall, 2-1 CCC) visits defending national champion Southern Oregon Friday and Saturday.

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