

Burns finally bests Butner, wins 2A/1A championship

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

PORTLAND — Garrett Burns had little success against Pine Eagle’s Coy Butner this season. That changed Saturday night.

The Imbler sophomore got the best of Butner when it mattered most, pinning him in the third round of the 2A/1A 113-pound championship match to win the state title and cap an impressive season.

“He beat me three times before, and coming back and pinning him was amazing,” he said. “It was an amazing feeling.”

Burns, clearly not afraid of the big stage at Portland’s Memorial Coliseum, said the difference Saturday night in the final was the energy he felt from the scene of the championships.

“Being at state, being surrounded by everyone, the crowd, the lights, just being on that mat gave me so much more of a drive,” he said.

For the sophomore, it finished a stellar campaign that saw him at or near the top of the podium in several tournaments, starting early in the season when he took second at the Mulenburg.

To reach the final, he pinned both Glendale’s Tanner Seidel and Central Linn’s Hagen Johnson on Friday, then slipped by Culver’s Brody Piercy by a 5-2 decision Saturday morning in the semifinals.

He was one of two Panthers competing at state. MyKail Foster reached the semifinals at 152 with a quarterfinal pin of Jefferson’s Bradley Bowser before finishing with a 1-2 record. The duo combined to give Imbler 32 points and 15th as a team.

Evans, Staigle, Ramsden each finish second

Enterprise’s Trace Evans had been dominant all season and was so against Friday and Saturday on his way to a berth in the state title bout at 138 pounds, but he was denied the state championship as he took a tough 7-5 loss to Central



Contributed photo by Ron Osterloh

Imbler’s Garrett Burns celebrates after pinning Coy Butner Saturday in the final of the 113-pound division during the 2A/1A state tournament in Portland.

Linn’s Hunter McIrvn.

“He’s a heck of a wrestler, real upper-body guy,” Evans said of McIrvn. “I just couldn’t get the shots to fall quite the way I wanted to.”

Evans, who finished the season with 47 wins on the mat, was barely touched on his way to the final, but he was locked up in a battle with McIrvn. Evans trailed 4-3 entering the third, then earned an escape to tie the score. But McIrvn scored two on a takedown to regain the lead, and he held on when Evans couldn’t secure his own takedown late.

Still, Evans called it a “great season” for the junior who heads into his final year next winter with some added motivation.

“Just keep doing my thing, keep working every day, get 1% better (each day),” he said.

Evans was the only EHS wrestler at state to win a match for the Outlaws, who as a team took 22nd.

Two Joseph/Wallowa wrestlers suffered a similar fate as Evans, as both Jonah Staigle and Zeb Ramsden dropped championship bouts to finish second on the season.

Ramsden (145) and Staigle (220) — the only wrestlers to reach state for

Joseph/Wallowa — each put together a strong run to reach the final. Ramsden opened with a pin of Lakeview’s Wyatt Patzke, then in the semifinals downed Union/Cove’s Carter Blackburn by fall. Staigle, meanwhile, pinned both Glide’s Jaden Rondeau and Rogue River’s Elijah Uyeda Friday, then eked out a 2-1 decision over Joshley Howell of Siletz Valley after Howell was called for stalling late in the third round to give Staigle the difference-making point.

But both ran into challenges in the final. Ramsden locked up with Culver’s Lane Downing most of the first round, but Downing claimed a takedown and seconds later a fall to win the title.

Staigle and Jimmy North of Central Linn met in the 220 final, where North managed to hold on for a 4-2 decision to deny Staigle the crown in a battle of the top two seeds in the weight class.

The two combined to give Joseph/Wallowa an 11th-place finish with 40 points.

Union/Cove posted a tie for 18th as a team with 27 points, led by Carter Blackburn’s fourth-place finish at 145.

All four of Blackburn’s matches were determined

by fall. The junior took his quarterfinal match from Austin Sicard and defeated Pete Crystal of Vernonia, but had the earlier semifinal loss to Ramsden before dropping the third-place match to Patzke by fall.

Jaxon Blackburn (126) and Michael Day (220) just missed out on placing as they both fell in the consolation semifinals. Jaxon Blackburn recovered from a first round pin against Bonanza’s Oak Tenold to win two in a row over Toledo’s Ethan Ferris and Elgin’s Kenny Terry by fall, but he dropped a 5-2 decision to Cutter Tanaka of Pine Eagle in the consolation semifinals.

Day dropped a close 4-3 decision to Jon Duarte of Siletz Valley in the opening round. He followed with pins over Sheridan’s Reiley Dearth and Coquille’s Tom Riley but was pinned by Howell late in the final round of the consolation semifinals.

Elgin scored six points as a team. Lathrop, the top seed at 132, had two victories — a pin over Glide’s Austin Warner and a 9-2 decision over Dylan Edwards of Gold Beach — after a loss by fall to Illinois Valley’s Ryan



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

Enterprise’s Trace Evans, right, took second at 138 pounds Saturday in Portland.



Contributed photo by Ron Osterloh

Joseph/Wallowa’s Zeb Ramsden, left, took second at 145 pounds Saturday in Portland.



Contributed photo by Ron Osterloh

Joseph/Wallowa’s Jonah Staigle, right, took second at 220 pounds Saturday in Portland.

Martinho in the quarterfinals, then bowed out in the consolation semifinals following a 16-7 major decision loss to Tanner Mestas of Bonanza. Terry dropped a first-round match to Reed-

sport’s Christian Solomon by technical fall, then bounced back to beat Chase Rodgers of North Douglas by a 9-2 decision before a loss to Jaxon Blackburn ended his tournament.

Gulzow becomes first Tiger to place at girls state tourney



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

La Grande’s Delia Gulzow, left, defeated North Medford’s Alyx Cameron on her way Saturday to a fourth-place finish in the girls 100-pound division.

By Ronald Bond
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PORTLAND — Delia Gulzow became the first La Grande girls wrestler to place in the state wrestling tournament as she took fourth at 100 pounds with a record of 2-2.

The freshman, who also was the first Tiger to compete at the girls state tournament, reached the semifinals after a 2-1 decision over North Salem’s Norely Lara. After dropping the semifinal match to La Pine’s Olivia Flack, Gulzow guaranteed herself a spot on the podium by defeating North Medford’s Alyx Cameron, taking over in the latter stages of the match to earn a 7-0 decision.

Her tournament run ended

with a close 4-2 loss to Newport’s Chelo Garcia. The wrestlers were tied at 2-2 late in the third round before Garcia tallied a near fall to grab the win and third place, while Gulzow took fourth.

“Being a freshman wrestling 1A through 6A girls was very challenging. I was happy with what I accomplished this year, and I hope to achieve higher placements in the upcoming years,” she said.

Gulzow garnered interest in the sport, she said, after watching her brothers’ practices when she was younger.

She’s not the only girl on the wrestling team — her sister, Bella, a junior, is among the other girls on the squad — but she is

hopeful her placing at state will draw even more interest to the girls program.

“I am hoping that my successes this year and previous years will inspire other girls to want to join wrestling,” she said. “Girls wrestling is the fastest growing sport in the U.S. and it’s amazing to watch it grow. When Bella was in eighth grade and I was in sixth grade we were the only girls on the team, and now there are around 10 in La Grande. That’s incredible growth in three years.”

The freshman also is grateful because of what La Grande has given her and said she is “proud to represent La Grande because I get to pay back the efforts of so many people who have helped me.”

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head success against the Huskies. And when a team claims a state crown by 6.5 points, any one or two of those matches going the other way could make the difference.

That head-to-head success was, I think, the No. 1 reason La Grande won the title.

Yes, there are other facets that led to the Tigers’ first state wrestling crown since 1996.

Team depth, of course, is a requirement to be able to win a ‘team’ tournament, which was why the Tigers and Huskies were among the favorites to claim the title. La Grande had 19 wrestlers in the tournament, and Sweet Home had 23 (the maximum a team could

take is 28).

Having the dominant wrestlers who are able to make runs to a championship clearly help in battling for a title, and did help boost La Grande past Sweet Home on Saturday — La Grande had seven wrestlers in the championship and came away with four individual titles, while Sweet Home had two in the finals and two champions.

But getting victories from wrestlers who take an early loss and battle their way back into position to place at state, or victories from those who drop their semifinal match, are just as big, and La Grande had several of those performances.

Brysen Penalosa dropped his match in the semifinals, but rebounded with back-to-back wins to

take third at 106 pounds (more on him in a moment). Cole Isaacson shook off a first-round loss to win five matches in a row and place third at 132. Alex Kehr earned important points with his fourth-place finish at 138, as did Dominick Caratello who was fifth at 120 and Wyatt Livingston by placing sixth at 145. In fact, of the 19 wrestlers for La Grande, 14 won at least one match to score points toward the team total — every point counts — and 12 of them placed.

And this is where La Grande’s success against the Huskies comes into play in a major way.

Head-to-head, La Grande and Sweet Home met on the mat in Portland a total of 15 times during the state tournament. La Grande’s record in those matchups was 10-5.

If even one of those 10 wins goes the other direction, that 6.5-point margin is shaved to just 0.5. If two of them flip, or if Sweet Home were to get some bonus points for a major decision, technical fall or pin in one of the other flipped matches, we might not be talking about a championship for La Grande.

The Tigers were successful against Sweet Home when it really mattered. There were, sadly, no La Grande-Sweet Home matchups in the finals (which would have made an already compelling championship round that much more juicy), but the teams had five showdowns in the semifinals, and La Grande took four of them.

Here’s where Penalosa’s weekend becomes even more important — he had not one, not two,

but three matches against Sweet Home wrestlers, and won all three of them, including two over Jake Sieminski, who defeated him at the Oregon Classic. All four of LHS’s individual state champions also defeated a Husky somewhere along the way.

It shows just how strong, talented, and deep this La Grande team was. It had dominant wrestlers who, it seemed, were barely touched during a championship run. It had key performances in important moments. And, up and down the weight classes, it had athletes step up to contribute to the team title.

The team showed head-to-head prowess all season long.

And now the team is No. 1 in the state as a result.