

Eagles reach semis

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

BAKER CITY — Stellar defense, sharp shooting early and a response when Damascus Christian made a rally Wednesday sent the Joseph Eagles to the state semifinals for the first time since 2009.

Up next: the undefeated Crane Mustangs.

Sabrina Albee scored 14 points and had two crucial baskets late in the third to halt a 13-0 Damascus Christian run, and the Eagles held Damascus Christian to its lowest point total of the season and ended its 16-game winning streak with a 42-27 win at the 1A state tournament at Baker High School.

“We’re not big,” head coach Lance Homan said with a laugh, “and so for us, we rely on defense. If we can keep teams from scoring what they normally do, we feel like we have a chance, so we base everything on that.”

The Eagles held Damascus Christian, which lost for just the third time this season, nearly 22 points below its average of 48.8 points per game, using quickness to knock the ball away and snag several steals while rotating well and forcing Damascus Christian to take several tough shots.

“We practice hard on deny and then making sure you’re in help,” Homan said of the defensive rotations. “It looks like a man, but it’s not. It’s kind of a matchup zone. We do have quick hands. We have quick girls. We try to get them where we make plays.”

The play of the defense and some early offensive success — Joseph hit four first-half 3-pointers — helped the Eagles to go ahead by as many as 17 points late in the first half and they seemed to be in complete control. An 11-0 run on 3-pointers from Madelyn Nelson, Albee and Brianna Micka and a jumper from Camille Crenshaw gave Joseph its largest lead at 26-9 with just over a minute to play in the first half.

“The first quarter when we had our run, I knew we were working together and that was good,” said Albee, who had eight points in the first half.

Damascus Christian got within 26-14 at halftime on an Ally Love jumper and a corner 3-pointer by Noelle



S. John Collins/EO Media Group

Joseph’s Brianna Micka drives to the basket Wednesday during the first half of the Eagles’ 42-27 win over Damascus Christian at the 1A state basketball tournament in Baker City. The win sent Joseph to the state semifinals for the first time since 2009.

Wakefield, then spent the first six minutes of the third chipping away at the deficit. A jumper by McKenna Patrick — on a third opportunity for DC on offense — got her team within six, and two free throws by Sierra Hale cut it to 26-22.

But Joseph didn’t panic, showing a trait Homan has seen from the team all season.

“You know (the opponent is) going to make a run, but it’s trying to withstand that and then having your own. They are hard to shake,” Homan said of his team. “They don’t get down. They’re pretty levelheaded, and they want to be here.”

With 1:40 to play in the third, Albee got loose in the corner, drove baseline and got a tough runner to bounce in to end the run and a nearly eight-minute scoring drought, then she scored on the low block on the next possession. Crenshaw followed with a putback before the quarter ended to put Joseph up 32-22.

“When we slow it down on offense, it makes it re-

ally hard for the defense to catch up to us,” Albee said. “Definitely slowing down quit their run and they were getting less steals.”

Jumpers by Rylee Wilcox and Crenshaw helped put Joseph ahead by 12 early in the fourth, and Damascus Christian got no closer than 11 the rest of the game.

“I feel like we always just know we’re going to win. In a way, we have that confidence,” Micka said of how the team stayed poised during the third quarter. “We don’t get worried. Even in district we had a couple really close games, but we never let it get to us because we know we’ll come back. Sometimes our third quarters are a little bit slower, but we know we’ll get back.”

Damascus Christian didn’t score for the first 5:16 of the game and committed six first-quarter turnovers while Joseph opened on a 10-0 run, with a 3-point play by Albee and a wing 3-pointer by Nelson helping Joseph take control early. Molly Curry’s jumper late in the period gave the Eagles a 12-4 lead after one.

The Eagles got scoring up and down the lineup after Albee, with Crenshaw scoring eight points, Micka seven, Nelson six and Curry five. Micka also had a game-high 13 rebounds, and Albee had four assists and four steals.

“We knew they were going to do a diamond-and-one on Sabrina or a triangle-and-two with Mads and Sabrina, which they did, and girls stepped up,” Homan said.

Wakefield hit three 3-pointers to finish with nine points for Damascus Christian, which shot just 28% and was outrebounded 36-26. Love added six points.

DC (24-3 overall) will face Valley 10 League rival Country Christian Thursday morning in the consolation bracket, while Joseph (22-6) gets a second shot at Crane at noon Friday in the semifinals. The Mustangs defeated Joseph earlier this season 54-30.

“I’m excited to have that rematch,” Micka said. “They’re a really good team. They’re athletic. I think it’ll be better than last time.”



Observer file photo

Kenzie Williams and the La GrandeTigers are one win from reaching the state tournament.

Tiger girls one win from quarterfinals

Observer staff

LA GRANDE — It’s been four years since the La Grande girls basketball team reached the Class 4A state tournament.

The Tigers are one win away from making that elusive return trip, as Friday they host Cascade in a first-round playoff game.

Cascade is a team La Grande has seen at the state level — in fact, in that very tournament in 2016, when the Cougars clipped La Grande 52-47 in the 4A state semifinals.

The Tigers (17-7 overall) have spent much of the season in the top five in the OSAA rankings and take a fifth seed into the matchup with the Cougars (15-9). La Grande has won eight of its last 10 contests, with the only two losses in that

stretch to Baker, which won the Greater Oregon League.

Cascade has heated up after a rough start to the season — including a six-game losing streak at one point — and enters having won 10 of its last 11. The lone loss in that stretch was to Philomath, the top-ranked team in Class 4A and the Oregon West Conference champion. Cascade was second in the OWC.

The Tigers boast a stronger offense and defense on paper, averaging 50.5 points per game and allowing just 36.8. The Cougars, meanwhile, score 45.9 and allow 40.5 points on average.

La Grande also has wins over four common opponents that Cascade lost to — Madras, Molalla, Yamhill-Carlton and McLoughlin.

See **Tigers** / Page 8A

Union girls open state run against Portland Christian

Observer staff

PENDLETON — The Union Bobcats are back in the 2A girls state basketball tournament for the first time since 2015 when they placed third. They will take their 14-game winning streak and stout defense into a quarter-final matchup with Portland Christian Thursday at 8:15 p.m. at Pendleton High School.

This will be the first meet-

ing between the teams since the 2014 state tournament, when Union edged the Royals 36-29 in the fourth-place game. To reach the quarterfinals, Union (24-3 overall) routed Lakeview 65-31 in the first round, while Portland Christian (24-4), which has won 12 of its last 13 games, took down Lost River on the road, 42-35.

See **Bobcats** / Page 8A

Four Mounties named to all-Cascade Conference team

Observer staff

LA GRANDE — Four Eastern Oregon University basketball players — two from the women’s team and two from the men’s — were named to the all-Cascade Collegiate Conference postseason award list, the CCC announced this week.

Jane Nelson led the women’s team by being named to the first team, and Rachel Fielder was named honorable mention.

Nelson and Fielder were the top two scorers for the Mountaineers, who went 22-10 on the season, averaging 11.1 and 11.0 points per game, respectively. The duo, in fact, were just two points apart in their respective point totals on the season — Nelson scoring 354 and Fielder 352.

Nelson, a senior guard, also averaged 3.7 rebounds, 1.9 assists and 1.0 steals. Fielder, also a senior, collected 4.4 rebounds, 1.1 assists and 0.6 steals per game, and led the team with 0.8 blocks.

Northwest Christian’s Morgan McKinney was named conference player of the year, and Beacons’ coach Chad Meadors was the head coach of the year.

For the EOU men, Max McCullough and Jarek Schetzle were selected to the first team after helping the Mountaineers to a 17-14 season.

McCullough, a junior guard, was the conference’s No. 3 scorer with 19.7 points per game, while Schetzle, a senior center, was fifth at 18.3 points per contest.

McCullough reached double figures in scoring in 30 of the team’s 31 games and also averaged 4.9 rebounds, 4.0 assists and 1.0 steals per game.

Schetzle, who led the nation with a .655 field goal percentage, collected 9.8 rebounds per game and was a consistent double-double threat, posting 16 in the Mountaineers’ 31 games. He also averaged 0.9 assists, 0.4 steals and 1.8 blocks.

Oregon Tech’s Mitchell Fink earned his third-consecutive CCC player of the year award, and Colby Blaine was named conference coach of the year after guiding top-ranked College of Idaho to the first undefeated season in CCC men’s history.



Observer file photo

Eastern Oregon University’s Max McCullough was one of four Mountaineers between the men’s and women’s teams named all-CCC.