

Howton to continue softball career with EOU

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — When the Eastern Oregon University softball team is able to take the field again in 2021, it'll have another La Grande Tiger on its squad.

LHS senior Jacie Howton, an infielder for the two-time defending state champions, signed her letter of intent March 10 to stay at home and play for the Mountaineers, fulfilling a dream she has had from a young age to play college softball.

"I've always had it in the back of my mind to stay home and play, but I think recently, once they got a new coach and started to see the program turn around, I wanted to be part of the rebuild and get the program back where it should be," she said.

She is currently the third player with LHS ties in the program, joining 2019 LHS graduate Alaina Carson and Brittney Bertrand, who played for LHS before transferring to Century High School in Hillsboro. More Tigers could join the team as well.

"It'll be cool to see more local girls on this team," Howton said.

EOU head coach Nicole Christian watched Howton from the other dugout for three years while she was head coach at McLoughlin, and she believes Howton will help move Eastern in the direction the coach is hoping.

"She's just one of those hometown kids who is

a great kid overall, and we're trying to change the culture here," Christian said. "We want the kids who want to work hard. La Grande is a very competitive program. When we played them, she was one of those kids we had to watch out for. She has a great glove, a great bat — just dedicated to the program."

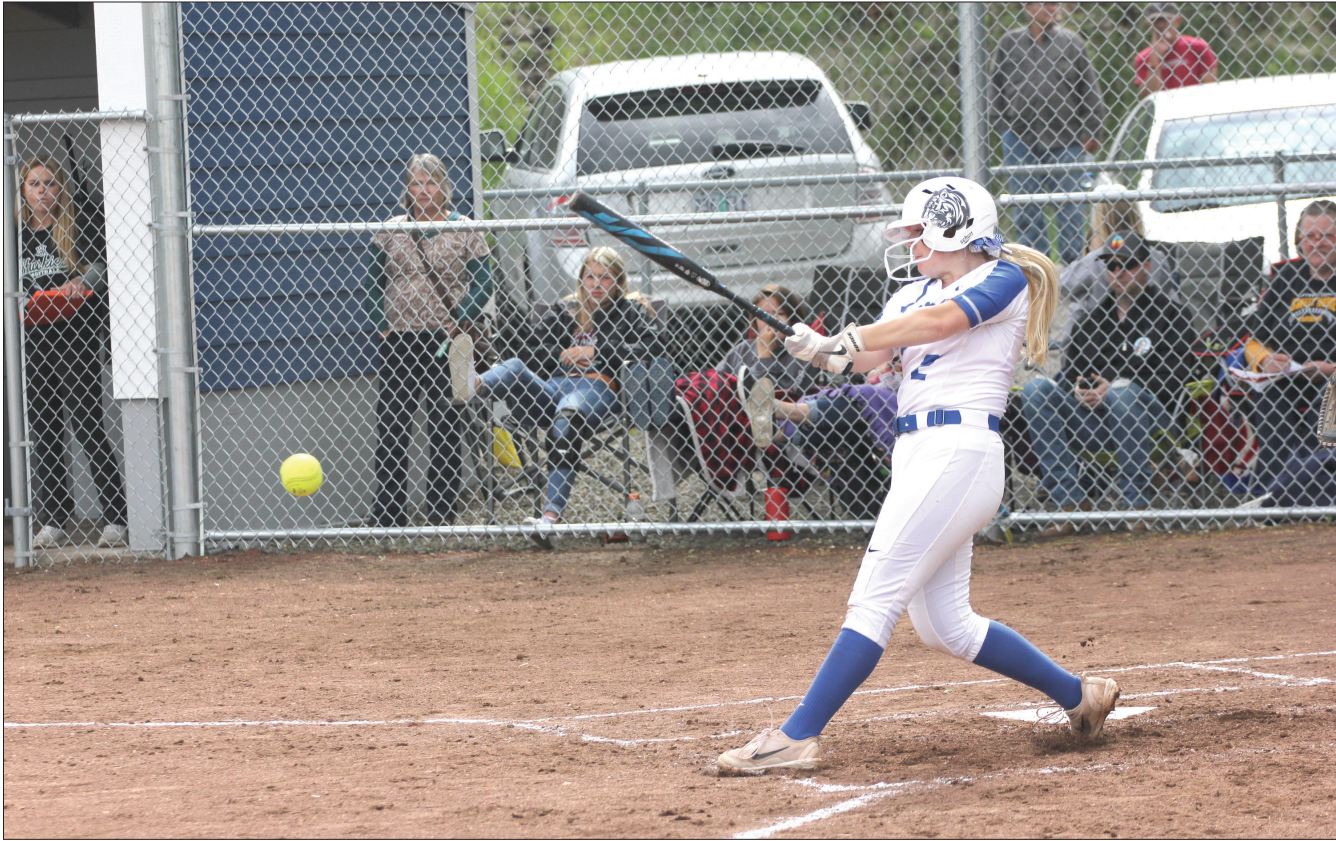
Howton, in joining EOU, not only will be playing for the coach of a former rival but will get to learn from arguably the best infielder to don a glove at Eastern, which is perfect for Howton.

"It's cool. It's not someone I don't know, or don't know the expectations," Howton said of getting to play for Christian. "I've seen her successful program at Mac-Hi (and) I'm really excited to learn from her just based off her past experiences and her experience from coaching."

Howton is in the process of recovering from surgery for a torn right meniscus, but does not foresee it being an issue.

The LHS senior said she is excited to discover how much she can grow at the college level.

"I really want to challenge myself and play better teams, play a lot more and see how much I can improve," she said, adding she is really looking forward to developing on the "defensive side. I really love playing defense and fielding."



La Grande's Jacie Howton, shown during the Tigers' playoff run in 2019, signed her letter of intent to play at Eastern Oregon University.

Christian added the biggest change for Howton likely will be adjusting to the speed of the college game.

"The big thing is just the different level...competition wise. Coming in as a freshman, there's a lot more to college softball," Christian said.

"The pace is a little bit faster. In the fall the girls (this year) got a little bit of a taste. Now (for) these freshmen playing for me it's a little faster but they're making that change. That's what I expect her to do."



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

Jacie Howton is flanked by her parents, Karen and Mike, on March 10 at Quinn Coliseum as she signs her letter of intent to play softball at Eastern Oregon University. Howton's father played for the Eastern Oregon baseball team, and was the one who helped spark her interest in the sport when she was a youth.



Observer file photo

The La Grande softball team celebrates a home run hit by Jayce Seavert (1) during the state semifinals last year. OSAA announced Wednesday it is further delaying the 2020 spring season in conjunction with the Oregon school closure, which runs through April 28, but it left the door open that a shortened season could be played.

High school spring sports season further delayed, but not canceled

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

WILSONVILLE — A day after Oregon Gov. Kate Brown extended the closure of Oregon's schools through April 28 in efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19, the Oregon School Activities Association adopted the same timeline, as late Wednesday it announced all practices and contests are now suspended through April 28.

Two of OSAA's activities, the state speech championships and the solo music state championships, have been canceled, as they had dates set for late April or early May.

The governing board of Oregon high schools sports, though, left the door open for an abbreviated spring sports season.

If practices were to resume April 29, and games shortly after, it would result in a sports season of about 2-1/2 weeks for golf (state championships are slated for May 18-19), three weeks for tennis (May 22-23), four for track and field (May 29-30), and five for baseball

and softball (June 5-6).

Peter Weber, executive director for OSAA, told The Observer on Wednesday afternoon the dates of those championship competitions played into the decision to try to salvage the season, even if it is shortened.

"We feel like those events are far enough out that there is a possibility they could take place," Weber said.

The OSAA Executive Board is scheduled to meet April 1 and April 15, and by then the members will have a better idea of the outlook for the spring.

If teams were to resume practice April 29, the outcome could be for some of the sports — like golf, Weber said — to have just a district tournament and the state tournament.

Sports such as baseball and softball, though, would still need some form of a season to determine who makes the playoffs.

"Baseball (and) softball, I'm not sure how that would work with no regular season," Weber said. "It would certainly be

truncated."

He added adjusting the dates of championship events could be on the table too.

"That's a potential consideration, (though) there could be some venue constraints," Weber said. "There are a lot of things on the table depending on how things shake out," he said. "I don't know how far we would go. We're already going into early June."

In the release, OSAA also announced the track and field championships, should they take place, would be moved from Hayward Field in Eugene "due to construction timelines" for the completion of the University of Oregon's new track venue. Like they were a year ago, Classes 1A, 2A and 3A would be held at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, and 4A, 5A and 6A would be at Mt. Hood Community College in Gresham.

Weber said the delay in construction at Hayward was not related to the coronavirus.

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