

OPINION

What could have been?

It sure is weird — having a spring without sports. To be certain, there are more pressing needs that have to be addressed in the upcoming weeks and months: Can we find a viable treatment for the coronavirus? Will we be able to open up the economy soon before long-lasting damage is caused? What will normal

look like once this has passed? I’ve been encouraged by reports I’ve read recently that COVID-19 may well have a much lower fatality rate than what current reports suggest — perhaps at or below 1%. If that indeed proves to be valid, then it looks like we could become a functioning, bustling society sooner rather than later.

But this is not a page to opine my thoughts on the coronavirus. It’s a sports page, after all.

So in the rest of this column, I want to touch base on what I think a couple of the top area stories from the spring would have been come the end of May and the beginning of June. Yes, I get it could be dejecting to think of the “could’ve, should’ve, would’ve,” but the reality is there likely would have been some spectacular feats this spring that we would have witnessed and I would have written about.

But with that said, here are just a few of the “what ifs.”

• The La Grande softball three-peat bid: The team was going to look a bit different with the loss of three seniors who played on both the 2018 and 2019 state champion teams, but many key pieces were back — ace Allie Brock, key offensive cogs Jayce Seavert, Jaiden Hafer and Jacie Howton, and up-and-coming standouts such as Kinzy Bowen and Grace Neer. The team was certainly the favorite to win a third straight state title, a feat that would have put it in rarefied air: only Churchill (twice), Crater, Harrisburg and Valley Catholic have won at least three softball titles in a row. La Grande had serious momentum as it had won 39 of its last 40 games. Would this senior class have met Henley in the playoffs a fourth year in a row? Would the team, which went 24-1 a year ago, have gone undefeated in 2020? What kind of insane numbers would their star players post? Only the LHS boys swim team from 2001-04 had won more than two championships in a row. A three-peat would have put the softball team’s run the past four years up for discussion as maybe the best ever by an LHS team.

My take? It deserves to be up there

anyway. This group not only became the first girls program to win a state crown in any sport for LHS, it showed an ability to flat-out dominate. It had a dynamic offense, stellar defense, top-notch pitching and solid coaching. I’m not a betting man, but I am almost certain this team would have hoisted another championship trophy in June.

• In the time I’ve been at The Observer, at least one team has won a state track title each year, and I’ve been fortunate enough

to cover championship-winning teams the last four springs. And other than Joseph’s 2016-17 repeat on the girls side, it’s been a different team each time. Could the LHS boys re-find the magic that led to its first track title in 2018? Would the Enterprise girls reload after they narrowly took the crown last year? Could Joseph be back in the mix (on either the boys or girls side)? How about Elgin? The Huskies had one of their best state efforts in decades last spring. All but two state contenders were back, and the team could have had enough firepower to get onto the podium.

• The La Grande football team won a title in the fall. The wrestling team won a title in the winter. Would the baseball team have given the boys programs a trifecta? The Tigers were in position to make a deep run, with future Division I athlete Logan Paustian healthy, a strong pitching staff led by do-everything athlete Parker Robinson, an offense that would have been clicking, a defense as good as any in the state and a veteran coaching staff. Oh, and several athletes with experience winning a state championship. They would have been almost a shoe-in to make the playoffs, and once there, you need only three wins to get to the final. They very well could have done that.

• On an individual level, two track athletes — Joseph’s Ellyse Tingelstad and Elgin’s Aaliyah Burton — were returning after winning multiple championships in 2019 — Tingelstad the 1A girls 1,500 and 3,000, and Burton the 1A girls 100 hurdles and 300 hurdles. They were favorites to be back on top again in those races as the area’s only returning multi-state champs.

There are numerous others I could go into, but time and space don’t permit me to say much more. I will say this, though: Speculating about “what if” is a favorite pastime of sports fans. Speculating with no way to know for sure is a small part of what has made this spring — one without sports — weird.

About the author: Ronald Bond is the sports editor of The Observer.

RONALD’S REPORT
RONALD BOND

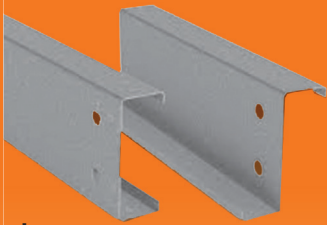




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