

Eastern Oregon ADs content with delay of sports seasons

By **Corey Kirk**
Baker City Herald

PENDLETON — After keeping the gym doors closed the last few weeks due to the “freeze” issued by Gov. Kate Brown and the Oregon Health Authority, the Oregon School Activities Association met virtually to discuss the future of high school athletics amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the first time in a while, athletic directors were able to get something they haven’t had for a while. Some clarity.

Due to the recent spike of COVID-19 cases in communities around the state, the initial start date for the winter sports season on Dec. 28 seemed to be too dangerous. So when it was announced on Monday, Dec. 7, that the start of sports was going to be pushed back, that didn’t come as a complete surprise to Pendleton High Athletic

Director Mike Somnis.

“It was expected, we weren’t sure what it was going to look like or what form it would take but we figured it would be delayed for a period of time,” Somnis said. “It was no surprise, it had to happen with the metrics and where they are at right now according to OHA, it just doesn’t line up to play indoor sports at the moment.”

Now with the winter sports season, or Season 2, being delayed, high school sports is set to begin with football practice as early as Feb. 8, 2021. Baker High Athletic Director Buell Gonzales Jr. sees the benefit of more time to pass for things to become safe.

“The middle of February is a good time, that gives us the things we’ve been hearing, the vaccine and stuff like that, time to happen or to take place,” he said.

After the decision to delay the start of high school sports was made, the board considered two proposals — one for two, nine-week seasons that each had a culminating week, and the adopted proposal of three, six-week seasons.

For La Grande Athletic Director Darren Goodman, having multi-sport athletes



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File
Pilot Rock’s Tel Thacker (31) leaps to take a shot during the second half against Grant Union. The Rockets defeated the Prospectors 68-40 on Saturday, Feb. 22, 2020, at the Pendleton Convention Center to win the Blue Mountain Conference district tournament title.

in his program would prove this proposal would be a conflict of interest.

“We have a lot of teams that share athletes so I

think that it’s important that the athletes aren’t made to choose and have their freedom to do both,” he said.

Gonzales Jr. shared the

same sentiment.

“I was glad to hear that they were not overlapping any sports just because at the Class 4A level, we share a lot of athletes so that was a positive thing,” he said.

The proposal that eventually was passed ended up shortening each of the three seasons to six weeks, moving winter sports to the end of the school year, playing between May and June. Though the transition will be interesting, Somnis sees this can work.

“At this point of the year, with the idea of buying more time for cases to drop or a vaccine to take hold, it’s the best outcome of the moment,” he said. “I’m not sure you can condense the seasons even more.”

Goodman is ready to do whatever they can to make the adjustment and get the most out of it.

“It is what it is, we are going to work with it the best way we can and get the best schedules we can and roll with it,” he said.

What remains uncertain is sports that have contact. Not only are winter sports like wrestling and basketball not able to compete, football is still in question as well. It makes someone like Gonzales Jr. wonder how that is going to

get addressed in the future when organized sports once again get closer.

“There has been no indication either way about contact sports, so we will see how that goes,” Gonzales Jr. said.

Now that the start of sports has been pushed back to at least early 2021, athletic directors are steadfast in providing opportunities for their student-athletes to be active. Although being indoors is off the table, organized conditioning is still taking place on some school grounds, as long as masks are on at all times.

“Still giving our kids opportunities and outlets to get out of the house and do something productive and positive,” Somnis said. “That is our No. 1 priority.”

Knowing that weather does play a factor, Goodman intends to have his coaches keep in contact with their athletes to give them instruction to be active when they are home.

“We are going to try and encourage coaches to make contact with athletes, stay involved and maybe give some homework out for kids to do at home,” he said. “Weather permitting, we can still do some things outside, if (weather) cooperates and lets us do some things.”

Two former Oregon Ducks QBs face off in NFL game

Raiders lose QB Carr, fall in overtime to Chargers, Herbert

By **W.G. Ramirez**
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Justin Herbert’s brilliant rookie season is now a record-setting campaign.

Herbert scored on 1-yard plunge to give the Los Angeles Chargers a 30-27 overtime victory over the Las Vegas Raiders on Thursday night.

“It was pretty crazy,” said Herbert, who set an NFL rookie record with his seventh 300-yard game and has 27 passing scores on the year, tying Baker Mayfield (2018) for the most by a rookie in NFL history. “I kind of waited to see the replay and guys didn’t really know what had happened. So I got up and started shaking hands and kind of saw the game was over.

The Chargers (5-9) snapped a nine-game losing streak against their AFC West counterparts, and snapped a three-game skid against the Raiders. Las



David Becker/AP Photo

Los Angeles Chargers tight end Hunter Henry, right, embraces quarterback Justin Herbert (10) after defeating the Las Vegas Raiders in overtime of an NFL football game, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020, in Las Vegas.

Vegas (7-7) lost quarterback Derek Carr to a left groin injury in the first quarter. It has lost four of five, all but killing its playoff chances.

Moments after Daniel Carlson’s 23-yard field goal on the Raiders’ first possession put Las Vegas ahead 27-24, Herbert found wideout Jalen Guyton streaking by cornerback Keisean Nixon for a 53-yard reception to set up the winning score.

Los Angeles improved to 1-2 in overtime games, while all four of its games against division foes have come down to the final play.

Herbert, who targeted nine receivers and completed at least one pass with seven, was 22 for 32 with 314 yards and two touchdowns.

“I’ve seen a lot of growth over the past couple weeks,” Chargers coach Anthony Lynn said. “He’s doing it with young receivers on the field and spreading the ball around.”

With five receptions for 65 yards and a touchdown, Los Angeles’ Hunter Henry now has a career-high 60 receptions on the year, third-highest among tight ends this season.

Imbler’s Hislop is Coach of the Year

By **Kaleb Lay**
The Observer

IMBLER — It’s been a good month for grapplers in the Grande Ronde Valley.

Imbler High School wrestling coach Doug Hislop has coached in Union County for half a century, and as he closes out his stellar career, the Oregon Coaches Association honored him this week as Coach of the Year.

“With all the great coaches out there, hey, they must not have been looking very far through their list. My goodness,” Hislop said.

Hislop coached the La Grande Tigers for more than three decades before retiring as La Grande’s superintendent and stepping back from the mat for the Tigers. Hislop kept busy, though, and to this day he is an accredited wrestling official who sits on the board of Eastern



Hislop

Oregon University’s wrestling program, where a new head coach was recently

named.

“If we get a season in this year, it’ll be 50 years,” Hislop said.

In 13 years leading Panther wrestling, Hislop has led three Imbler boys to state championship victories. The way he sees it, though, that’s only a footnote to his success.

“It depends on how you measure success. Do you measure success because you were Nick Saban and you got paid millions of dollars a year, or because you were Mike Bellotti and you had some success and wins and losses, but you treated your kids and the individuals you worked with phenomenally?”

Hislop, reflecting on

his half-century career, said his greatest successes were helping students graduate. He recalled a time during his tenure as Imbler’s superintendent when the school achieved a 100% graduation rate, calling that a significant achievement.

“Your parents didn’t send you to school to be there for 12 years, they sent you to school to get an education and graduate. That’s our job as educators, to get that done. I think it’s my job as a coach, I think it’s my job if I were the bus driver or the custodian or whatever else,” Hislop said.

Not one to hold back a good story, Hislop shared several tales of the youths he pushed to graduation over the years. He said he tried to teach them to be good family members, good students and then good wrestlers — in that order.

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