

The Observer’s top 10 sports stories of 2020

10. La Grande swim coach puts in a final lap

LA GRANDE — Darren Dutto ended his run as La Grande High School’s swim coach with the 2020 season. He headed the program for 15 years, and under his tutelage La Grande earned 14 state trophies — including the 4A/3A/2A/1A boys championship trophy in 2016.

While he did not rule out a return to coaching, Dutto, 51 when he resigned, said he was ready for “life to be a little less crazy.”

He stepped away with a track record few can match. La Grande not only won its fifth boys swim title under Dutto but claimed two second-place trophies and took both third and fourth twice. The girls program claimed second in 2012, taking third four times and fourth twice. The girls program earned a trophy at state in six of the past seven years, and the boys took home hardware five of the last six.

That included the state meet in February, where the boys placed fourth — even Dutto said no one expected such a high finish after losing key players from the year prior. The girls team took third at state and set a program-best point total.

But it was not the medals that drove Dutto.

“My philosophy has been to have each kid swim to their potential, and as part of that, it’s about overall growth and maturation,” he said. “I always want to guide kids to swim as well as they’re able in the context of making them good citizens.”

9. Megan Bolton rewrites EOU record books

LA GRANDE — Megan Bolton has drawn comparisons — and understandably so — to a record-setting sprinter who bears a similarity in name.

“All the time,” she said of how often Jamaican Usain Bolt has been brought up to her, adding friends would add a dash or an ellipse in her name — Bolt-on or Bolt ... on.

The sophomore sprinter rewrote the record books for the Eastern Oregon University women’s track and field team. In early 2020, she set program records in the indoor 60-meter dash, the 400 and the 600, which, she said, is her favorite indoor race.

During the final days of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics national championships in March in Brookings, South Dakota, Bolton broke EOU’s record in the 600 again with a time of 1:31.90, earning a second place and all-American honors.

“I think about my races,” she said back in February, “but I think about what I can do better in the next one.”

8. Union girls basketball has outstanding season

UNION — The Union High School girls basketball team went on a run in 2019-20 that proved it to be one of the best in the state. And two of Union’s players received a similar recognition fol-



The Observer, File
Joseph’s Sabrina Albee was one of three players to share 1A state player of the year honors for 2020.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File
Union’s Callie Glenn (22) chases a loose ball March 5, 2020, during the quarterfinal round of the OSAA 2A State Basketball Tournament at Pendleton High School. The Union Bobcats defeated the Portland Christian Royals 45-35. The Bobcats finished their season 25-5 overall.



The Observer, File
La Grande High School head swim coach Darren Dutto throws his fists in the air during a race in February 2020 at the state swim meet in Beaverton. The boys team took fourth at state and the girls finished third. Dutto resigned from his role as the swim coach after a 15-year run where he guided the boys and girls each to seven state trophies, including the 2016 boys state title.

lowing the season.

The Bobcats returned to the 2A girls state basketball tournament for the first time since 2015

when they placed third. The team was on a 14-game winning streak and 24-3 overall going into the quarterfinal matchup with Port-

land Christian at Pendleton High School. The Bobcats emerged victorious.

But the following game was a

tough semifinal loss to Monroe, 45-27, dropping the Bobcats to the consolation bracket and a matchup with the Bandon Tigers. Bandon would win 56-34 to take third place and force Union into fifth. Still, the Bobcats finished 25-5 overall.

The title eluded the team, but sophomore guard Callie Glenn and senior guard Brianna Kohr earned 2A all-state team honors. Glenn was tapped as a first-team all-state performer for the Bobcats and Kohr was honorable mention.

7. Joseph junior shares honors for state player of the year

JOSEPH — An unprecedented vote resulted in the selection of an area basketball standout as one of the three best players in the state.

Joseph junior Sabrina Albee, who was instrumental in helping the Eagles girls basketball team to a fifth-place finish at the 1A state tournament in March in Baker City, was named co-state player of the year along with two other athletes — Crane’s Kelsie Siegner and St. Paul’s Erin Counts. All three were unanimous first-team selections.

Albee said it was “really cool” to not only be noticed by the rest of the 1A coaches in the state but to be in the same billing with Siegner and Counts.

The do-everything guard scored 20.3 points per game, and also had 7.1 rebounds, 3.2 assists and 3.1 steals per game. She scored 45.8% of the team’s points on the season.

And she reached two major milestones in scoring. Early in the season, she surpassed the 1,000-point mark in her career, and before the season was done, she had moved past 1,500 career points.

Her standout year — in which she scored 610 points — finished with her sitting at 1,598 points. The state recognition came after

See, Sports/Page 11C

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