

# Union High School athlete is overcoming obstacles

Breathing disorder does not derail Marielle Graffunder's solid track start

By **COREY KIRK**  
Baker City Herald

**UNION** — Union High Bobcat freshman Marielle Graffunder has found herself over the last handful of weeks lining up on starter blocks or sprinting down a run line with a pole tucked under her arm. From the moment she begins her stride till she free falls down to the mat, pole vaulting is something Graffunder refers to as “dynamic.”

“When you get it down, and you get the form down, it feels so rewarding to do it correctly, and clear good heights,” Graffunder said. “The dynamics are just so interesting.”

On the cusp of finishing her first year of competing in high school, Graffunder has been a consistent force in short distance and in pole vaulting. This comes to no surprise to head track coach Jay Blackburn, who has coached Graffunder since middle school.

“I’ve known her since she was little. She moved to Union about five years ago, and is also friends with my daughter,” Blackburn said.

Prior to the pandemic, Graffunder would be on the cross-country course, playing basketball and volleyball in the gym and out at the track competing. All of that changed when she was diagnosed with



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Union High freshman Marielle Graffunder competes Friday, April 30, 2021, in the pole vault at the River's Edge Invitational in Umatilla. Her vault of 9 feet was a personal record and the top vault for girls at the meet. Union High teammate Jayda Blackburn took second in the event.

vocal cord dysfunction. As described by the Cleveland Clinic, VCD is when instead of vocal cords opening, they close, making it harder to get air into or out of the lungs. Although sharing many similarities to asthma, this diagnosis left Graffunder having to reevaluate what sports she could participate in.

“I started having symptoms my seventh-grade year while in cross-country. (It happens) whenever I am overly happy or stressed, so it makes it very difficult to do things like cross-country and basketball,” Graffunder said.

While it wasn't feasible to continue participating in cross-country and basketball, Graffunder still was able to play her first season of volleyball for the Bobcats just a month ago, and she moved to short-distance running in track to still

being able to run.

“The furthest I can go is 400. It's weird because practices are difficult because I can't fully complete each workout,” Graffunder said.

As for field events, Graffunder began trying to pole vault during her time in middle school. Recognizing her athletic ability, Blackburn saw she was going to thrive in the technical work that takes place in pole vaulting, coaching her in the field event since she was in the seventh grade.

“She's a gifted athlete,” he said. “She probably doesn't know how talented she is at this point, and how much potential she has.”

Her approach on the pole vault is similar to what she does with her running — she goes into autopilot, not really having any thoughts run through her mind.

“As long as I clear the

height, it's just a sigh of relief when I land,” Graffunder said.

Graffunder has continued to impress during her first season in high school, posting high numbers in the 100 meters (14.74a), 400 meters (1:06.32a), pole vault (9'0”) and being a pivotal member of UHS relay teams, according to [www.athletic.net](http://www.athletic.net). Blackburn sees opportunity for Graffunder to accomplish a lot in her high school career.

“I think my No. 1 priority for all of my athletes is to develop good people, learn how to set good goals, and to be the best that they can be,” Blackburn said.

In the last few weeks of her freshman season, Graffunder is hopeful she can at least go 1 foot higher on her pole vault, but she sees her focus going into improving her times in her running events.

# No fans allowed at track & field championships

The Observer

**LA GRANDE** — Fans will not be able to see the 2021 Cascade Collegiate Conference Outdoor Track & Field Championships in person this weekend in La Grande.

The big track events take place Friday and Saturday, May 14-15, at Banner Bank Track on the campus of Eastern Oregon University. The CCC announced due to the high number of athletes, coaches and meet workers at the two-day meet, it will not allow fans to attend either day.

“This decision comes as a way to keep all student-athletes, coaches, and workers involved with the meet safe,” according to the announcement from the conference.

Fans, however, can follow the meet live online here: [bit.ly/3bllzqu](http://bit.ly/3bllzqu). Day-by-day recaps for the meet will be online at [www.EOUSports.com](http://www.EOUSports.com).

You also can find that and more information, including a full event schedule for this year's championship, at [cascadefconference.org](http://cascadefconference.org).

## Local sports roundup

### MONDAY, MAY 10

#### PREP BASEBALL

Union/Cove at home defeated Lyle/Wishram/Klickitat/Trout Lake in Heppner 11-2.

### TUESDAY, MAY 11

#### PREP BASEBALL

La Grande at home defeated

Ontario 11-1, 11-1.

#### PREP SOFTBALL

La Grande defeated Ontario on the road 14-4, 13-2. Wallowa Valley at Union/Cove split a double header. Cove/Union won game one 8-6; Wallowa Valley won game two 11-7.

## Local sports schedule

### THURSDAY, MAY 13

#### PREP BASEBALL

La Grande vs. Crook County in Pendleton, 1 p.m.

La Grande at Pendleton, 4:30 p.m.

### FRIDAY, MAY 14

#### PREP BOYS TENNIS

La Grande at Four Rivers Dual in Ontario, 3 p.m.

#### COLLEGE TRACK & FIELD

Cascade Collegiate Conference Track & Field Championships, La Grande, 2 p.m.

### SATURDAY, MAY 15

#### PREP BASEBALL

Baker/Powder Valley at Nyssa, 10 a.m.

Union/Cove at McLoughlin, 11 a.m.

Burns at Wallowa Valley, 2 p.m. La Grande at Pendleton, 4 p.m.

#### PREP SOFTBALL

Baker/Powder Valley at Nyssa, 10 a.m.

Union/Cove at Umatilla, 11:30 a.m.

Wallowa Valley at Burns, 12 p.m.

#### COLLEGE TRACK & FIELD

Cascade Collegiate Conference Track & Field Championships, La Grande, 11 a.m.



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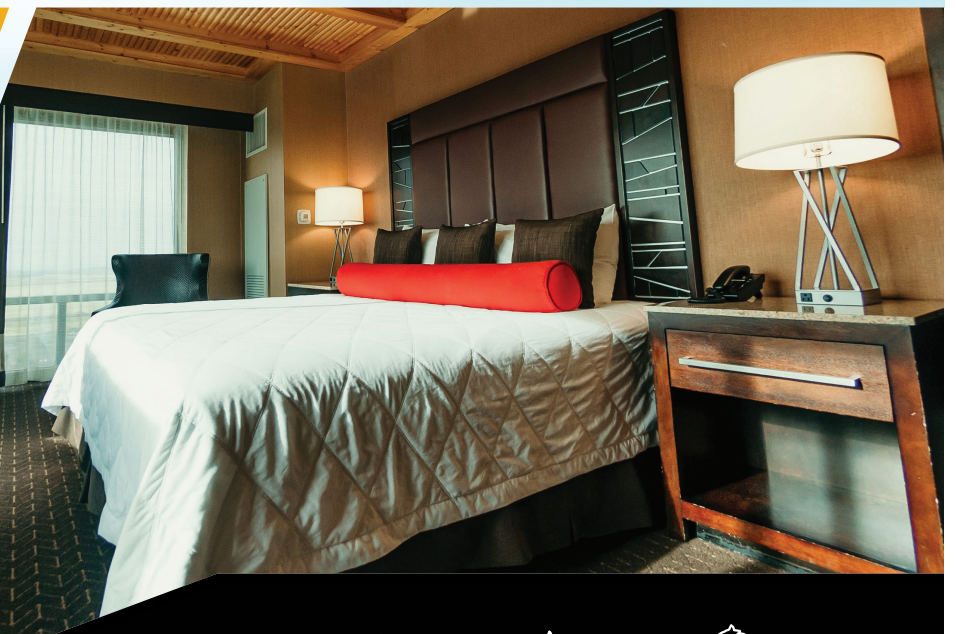
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