

# Hitting the high score

Max McCullough shatters basketball points record at EOU

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Everywhere you look in the Eastern Oregon University men's basketball record book, you can find the name of Max McCullough.

During his fourth season at EOU, McCullough became the school's all-time leader in points scored, three-point field goals made and free throws made.

McCullough has recorded 2,061 career points to date, becoming the first Mountaineer to surpass 2,000 points. Randy Dolven set the previous record of 1,790 points in 1967.

"Basketball is something I've been working toward my whole life," McCullough said. "To be able to play at the college level, let alone break those records, really shows how much I've worked and proves to myself that it has all paid off."

Born in Spokane, Washington, and raised in Post Falls, Idaho, McCullough joined the program in 2016 after a prolific high school career. Former EOU head coach Isaac Williams recruited McCullough at the beginning of his tenure.

An efficient scorer right from the start, McCullough helped the 2016-17 Mountaineers set a season record for points scored (2,976) and scoring average (90.7 points per game). However, EOU has missed out on the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics tournament every season since McCullough's freshman year. Heading into next season of his eligibility at EOU, McCullough is making it his personal goal to change that.

"The individual stats have been awesome, but I would trade that for a national tournament run any day of the week," McCullough said.

The guard has a career record of 85-43 as a Mountaineer in addition to his scoring accolades. McCullough's career scoring average of 18.9 points per game sits at fifth all time in the EOU record book.

"He just works as hard as any player we've had over the four years I can speak on," said assistant coach Chris Kemp. "He just lives in the gym that way."

One aspect of McCullough's game that improved over time was his ability to record assists and get teammates open looks at the basket. McCullough boosted his assist average every season at EOU.

"I like to have the ball in my hands, and a big thing for me is to make



The Observer/Ronald Bond, File

Eastern Oregon University men's basketball player Max McCullough goes in for a score in a Dec. 14, 2019, game in La Grande against Pacific University. He scored 41 points in that game. McCullough is the first EOU men's basketball player to score more than 2,000 career points.

my team better and exploit mismatches," McCullough said.

McCullough led the Cascade Collegiate Conference with 102 assists last season, averaging 5.2 per game.

For McCullough, several road bumps forced him to overcome adversity during his time so far as a Mountaineer. The guard missed the entire 2018-19 season due to a severe ankle injury, which eventually required surgeries on both ankles.

"Mentally it was tough," McCullough said. "It took me pretty much all of last season, and I didn't feel like myself until the playoffs."

The ankle injury made it difficult for McCullough to train during the offseason. Still, McCullough bounced back and averaged 19.6 points per game in 2019 and 21.1 points per game this past season.

"I think the mental side was just as tough as the physical side," Kemp said. "It was a grind for him the whole year, which would be hard on anyone."

In addition to injury, COVID-19 has presented several challenges. The 2020-21 season was delayed and shortened, with no fans able to attend games.

Throughout the buildup to the season, the NAIA moved back the start date multiple times. McCullough said the EOU basketball team was training all through that waiting period.

"We had just been going so hard for so long that once (the season) got here we were kind of exhausted," McCullough said.

Even with these obstacles, McCullough excelled in 2020, averaging career highs in nearly every category. He converted 10 three-point field goals against Warner Pacific on April 3 and scored 43 points against Bushnell on April 16. In the matchup against Warner Pacific, McCullough drained a corner three to pass Dolven's career scoring record.

The Cascade Collegiate Conference announced on Thursday, May 13, that McCullough won the 2021 Player of the Spring award, as well as First Team All-CCC. The College Sports Information Directors of America named McCullough to the 2021 Academic All-District Team, his second time receiving the honor.

Academics is a crucial element of being a student athlete for McCullough, which Kemp credited to his competitive personality.

"I've never heard of him getting any Bs or anything. School comes pretty naturally for him," Kemp said. "I think all the teachers love him."

Due to NAIA eligibility rules, which granted players an extra year of eligibility due to the COVID-19 pandemic, McCullough has his eyes set on coming back strong next year and fostering a winning environment at Eastern.

"I think we're going to have a good shot at making a run in the conference tournament and at the national level as well," McCullough said. "That is something I really want to achieve, taking EOU to the national tournament my senior year."

## Pioneer Park fields may get artificial turf

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Portions of two fields at Pioneer Park could be virtually weatherproof in the near future.

The La Grande School District, the city of La Grande, Eastern Oregon University and local businesses and donors are teaming up in an attempt to install artificial turf at Optimist Field and either Sam Marcum Field or Doug Trice Community Field.

The La Grande School Board agreed via consensus on Wednesday, May 12, to explore the possibility of helping to get artificial turf on two Pioneer Park fields.

Plans have not been finalized, but they call for artificial turf at Optimist Field, where baseball games are played, and either Marcum Field or Trice Field, both softball game sites. Artificial turf would be installed only on the infields of Optimist and Marcum fields. However, if artificial turf were installed at Trice Field, it would be in the infield and outfield.

Turf will be installed at Trice Field only if additional funding needed for it becomes available, said Cody Bowen, co-head coach of La Grande High's girls softball team.

Bowen said it would not be feasible to install artificial turf only in the infield of Trice because its outfield tends to take on water when conditions are wet. If turf were installed only in the infield there would be times when the infield would be playable but the outfield would not be.

"The outfield would be a swamp. It would be pointless to install turf only in the infield," said Bowen, who also is Union County sheriff.

A big reason Bowen would prefer to have artificial turf at Trice Field is that it would be easier to protect than Marcum Field, which vandals sometimes drive across and damage. Bowen said a high fence could be put around Trice Field but not Marcum Field because a portion of it must be kept open to allow youth football games at Pioneer Park in the fall.

The La Grande School

District would provide between \$130,000 and \$150,000 for the project, the city of La Grande's parks department would contribute \$25,000 and EOU would donate \$75,000. In addition, several Union County businesses and community members have indicated they would donate their services, said Parker McKinley, La Grande High School's baseball coach.

La Grande City Manager Robert Strobe said there would need to be a bidding process before the city council would award a contract for the project, which leaves the project with an uncertain timeline. While there is hope work could start as early as May or June, the bidding could push that start date back weeks or even months.

McKinley said Optimist Field needs artificial turf because it receives a lot of wear with the Tigers and EOU baseball teams playing home games there. La Grande High has played at Optimist for decades and EOU began playing there this season after reinstating its baseball program.

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### Local sports schedule

#### SATURDAY, MAY 15

##### PREP BASEBALL

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

Union/Cove at McLoughlin, 11 a.m.

Burns vs. Wallowa Valley at Baker City, 2 p.m.

La Grande JV vs. Crook County at Pendleton, 1 p.m.

La Grande JV at Pendleton, 4 p.m.

##### PREP SOFTBALL

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

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

### Local sports roundup

#### WEDNESDAY, MAY 12

##### PREP SOFTBALL

Grant Union/Prairie City defeated Baker/Powder Valley 11-0, 21-3.

#### THURSDAY, MAY 13

##### PREP BASEBALL

La Grande on the road defeated Pendleton 7-4.

Baker/Powder Valley at home defeated Wallowa Valley 3-0.

Wallowa Valley vs. Burns at Baker City, 12 p.m.

##### PREP TRACK AND FIELD

La Grande at the Ontario Greater Oregon League Invitational, Ontario.

##### COLLEGE TRACK & FIELD

EOU at CCC Outdoor Championships, La Grande.

##### MONDAY, MAY 17

##### PREP BASEBALL

La Grande at District Playoff in The Dalles, time and opponent TBD

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