

La Grande baseball concludes season as runner-up in 4A state playoffs

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The La Grande High School baseball team ended its season this weekend, finishing with a 14-2 record on the year. The Tigers came just one game shy of winning the 4A state championship, but were defeated by Hidden Valley in a heartbreaker at North Marion High School.

La Grande led 2-1 heading into the bottom of the seventh inning, but fell 5-2 to Hidden Valley when Isaac Hill hit a two-out, walk-off grand slam. For the Tigers, it concludes one of the winningest seasons in recent years despite the challenges of completing the season in the midst of COVID-19.

"I think it just speaks highly to our community and our kids and their families," said La Grande head coach Parker McKinley. "Our administrators have worked tirelessly for all of our sports to be able to have some idea of success and opportunity this year."

The Tigers were dominant in the regular season, losing only one game in an



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

La Grande High School catcher Cole Jorgenson swings at a pitch in the strike zone during a doubleheader against Baker on May 8, 2021. The Tigers finished the season as runner-ups in the 4A state championship.

early-season matchup versus Pendleton. La Grande rode a 10-game winning streak into the conclusion of the regular season and averaged just under 13 runs per game.

In the first round of the playoffs the Tigers were scoring runs left and right again, beating Gladstone 18-1. Following a narrow 7-4 victory over Banks in the semifinals, La Grande lost for only the second time this year with the championship game setback.

"What stands out is the perseverance of the kids and their families, as well as all of the coaches that committed themselves to the season and the program," McKinley said.

The Tigers have four seniors graduating, all of whom competed on the team for all four years of their high school careers. La Grande's ace, Riley Miller, pitched a gem in the championship game and concluded a stellar season.

"It was probably the best performance of his career to this point," McKinley said. "Big players step up to big moments."

Miller recently committed to Clark College in Vancouver, Washington to continue his baseball career at the collegiate level. For McKinley, senior athletes moving on from high school is always a difficult process.

"That's an emotional thing every year for us as coaches," McKinley said.

McCullough named CoSIDA Academic All-American for second straight season

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LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University's Max McCullough was named to the College Sports Information Directors of America's 2020-21 Academic All-America NAIA first team on Tuesday, May 25.

For EOU's all-time leading scorer, this is his second straight season on the Academic All-America team. McCullough was named to the second team in 2019-20.

"I'm kind of a perfectionist as a person, so I always strive to get the highest grade possible in my classes," McCullough said in an interview for a feature article by *The Observer*.

McCullough, a fifth-

year senior, has already graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration with an emphasis in marketing and management. According to McCullough, he is now in graduate school studying for a master's in business administration.

The Post Falls, Idaho, native maintains a career average of 18.4 points per game and is the only player in EOU history to eclipse 2,000 career points.

Taylor Stricklin of the Eastern women's team was awarded CoSIDA All-District team along with McCullough on May 10. Stricklin is majoring in health and human performance while starting in 46 games throughout her career at EOU.

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Amanda Loman/Associated Press, File

Oregon State receiver Zeria Beason (18) catches a pass from quarterback Tristan Gebbia for a touchdown over Oregon cornerback Deommodore Lenoir (0) last season in Corvallis.

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late in the year and finished 2020 with 148 yards on 16 catches.

Even with a receiver room that was stocked with seven or eight starting-caliber pass-catchers, Lindgren and coach Jonathan Smith still constantly kept the youngest member of that group on the field.

"I think his precision in his route running has always been really good," Smith said. "But now he understands the complete package. We're able to move him around to multiple positions inside and out. That's been a nice step."

On Oregon State's last play of the season, Beason caught an 18-yard pass from Ben Gulbranson on a 50-50 ball at the back of the end zone. The play came in a blowout loss, but served as a glimpse at the future with two talented freshmen combining for a dazzling play.

However, Beason puts less stock in that particular moment as providing momentum for him to succeed moving forward. Instead, he believes that the work he puts in on a day-to-day basis is a better indicator that consistent in-game success will come in 2021.

Those who are tasked with trying to slow him down at practice tend to agree.

"I love that competition everyday at practice," cornerback Alex Austin said. "Zeria, he's a guy that's gonna work. Every day, every play. He's not gonna take a snap off. Being able to compete with him everyday, I love it. He's a baller."

A standout at Duncanville High School in Texas, Beason and the Panthers

went to back-to-back 6A state title games amidst the most competitive high school football landscape in the country.

"A lot of people compare high school football there to junior college," Beason said. "I feel like the competition level really translated and really helped me get to the next level and understand the basics."

In that sense, Beason arrived in Corvallis physically prepared for the jump from high school to the Pac-12 that so many players struggle with. At 6 feet, 198 pounds, he is one of Oregon State's bigger receivers and played like it.

But he didn't get a full spring season after the pandemic cut it short, and had to learn a new playbook from scratch in the fall. Oregon State runs a pro-style offense that differs greatly from the spread scheme he was used to playing in high school.

After more than a year of immersing himself in Lindgren's scheme, he no longer has to rely on just his physicality.

"I feel I'm more prepared mentally," Beason said. "Just because (receivers coach Kefense Hynson) has done a good job informing me and teaching me the basics of being a receiver. I feel like I'm a little more polished than I was last year."

Playing time is going to be hard to come by in 2021 for Oregon State receivers who don't bring something special to the table. The Beavers return Trevon Bradford, Tre'Shaun Harrison, Champ Flemings, Tyjon Champsey and Beason, all of whom started at times last season. Anthony Gould and Jesiah Irish are long-time special teams contributors who will expect to play their way onto the field at receiver.

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2021 EASTERN OREGON PHOTO CONTEST

Official Rules:
Photo Contest open now and closes at 11:59 pm Sunday, June 20, 2021.
Staff will choose the top 10. The public can vote online for People's Choice from 12:01 am Monday, June 21 through 11:59 pm Thursday, June 30.
Digital or scanned photos only, uploaded to the online platform. No physical copies.
Only photographers from Oregon may participate.
The contest subject matter is wide open but we're looking for images that capture life in Eastern Oregon.

Entrants may crop, tone, adjust saturation and make minor enhancements, but may not add or remove objects within the frame, or doctor images such that the final product doesn't represent what's actually before the camera.
The winners will appear in the July 8th edition of Go Magazine; the top 25 will appear online.
Gift cards to a restaurant of your choice will be awarded for first, second and third place.

Submit all photos online at: lagrandeobserver.com/photocontest

GRH Behavioral Health Clinic

Grande Ronde Hospital and Clinics is pleased to announce that Blue Mountain Associates, an outpatient mental health treatment center, will become part of the GRH health system. The transition to the new **GRH Behavioral Health Clinic** takes effect June 1, 2021. For more information, visit grh.org/behavioralhealth.



GRH Behavioral Health Clinic Providers (back row from top) Joel Rice, MD; Mary Goldstein, LCSW; Jim Sheehy, LCSW; (front row from top) Brittany Pryce, LCSW; Heather Holland, MSW, CSWA; and Gloria Turner, LCSW.

Joining forces to better provide a broader spectrum of health services for Union County.