



DAVIS CARBAUGH
CARBAUGH'S CORNER

2021 hoops season unlike any before

This year's modified spring basketball schedule has caused chaos that coaches, athletes and even reporters never quite expected.

In what would normally span most of the winter and into the spring, this year's basketball season has been condensed into about four weeks. To make things more difficult, head coaches are dealing with players still competing in spring sports, seniors graduating and back-to-backs on a regular basis.

"It's just been a constant, really changing and evolving thing this year," Tony Haddock, Imbler boys basketball coach, said.

In basketball seasons of the past, teams would occasionally play games on back-to-back nights. However, several teams around the area are playing games up to four days in a row, with little time to practice in between games. Back-to-backs are also much more common now than in previous years.

Another key element is the lack of an offseason, with most teams being very limited compared to previous years. Haddock noted the Imbler boys played around 10 games this spring with roughly five practices all season.

Many elite athletes in the area often excel in multiple sports, which has had a big impact on this season. Baseball and track state championships were held in May, forcing many multi-sport athletes to miss the first few games of the 2021 basketball season.

While the circumstances are difficult, the playing field is fairly even in that all teams have to overcome similar challenges. Powder Valley girls basketball coach Allen Bingham echoed the sentiment that the lack of practice has been detrimental.

"You're introducing stuff pre-game and learning it on-the-fly during the game," Bingham said.

Bingham and the Badgers have yet to conduct a practice where every athlete on the team was in attendance. Between graduations, senior trips and crossover into spring sports, teams with many upperclassmen have faced obstacles that would never be an issue in previous years.

The Union boys team started its season 6-2, with a stretch of games on three-straight days and a period of three games in four days.

"It's definitely a shift as a coaching staff," Union head coach Odin Miller said. "We have to be really patient and understanding about the circumstances. I can't

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Bullfighting brothers Ryan Manning and Miles Barry, with Sean Peterson, taunt the angry bull White Noise away from a downed cowboy on Thursday, June 10, 2021, at the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show in Union. Bullfighters spend years learning how to manage adrenaline and fear while in the ring, allowing them to keep clear minds while facing down bulls.

For the love of rodeo

Support personnel make sure Ed Miller Xtreme Bull Riding event runs smoothly

By CARLOS FUENTES
The Observer

UNION — Blake West had a long day. For most people, the Ed Miller Xtreme Bull Riding event at the 2021 Eastern Oregon Livestock Show started at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, June 10, and finished a little over two hours later. For West, the event started at 8 a.m. and didn't finish until long after the bulls were done bucking and the crowd had gone home.

West, a Union High School graduate and Blue Mountain Community College rodeo coach, is a pickup man for bull riding shows — in other words, during every ride, he is mounted on a horse waiting to steer the bull to the exit. He said he considered this year's show a success, which he attributes to the event planners.

"The guys here at the stock show do a great job. This is my favorite rodeo all year," he said. "It's like a family and high school reunion every time it happens, and I really do love it."

However, being a pickup man requires more than two hours of work. Throughout the day, West was constantly sorting, gathering and transporting livestock, all to ensure that the main event ran smoothly.

Out of 39 bull riders, Payton Fitzpatrick and Ruger Piva tied for first place with scores of 84. Each of them earned \$3,388 for the win. Heavy favorite Derek Kolbaba, a Wallowa County native who now lives in Walla Walla, was scheduled to compete but was not in attendance.



Carlos Fuentes/The Observer

Blake West, a pickup man at the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show in Union, readies a lasso Thursday, June 10, 2021, during the Ed Miller Xtreme Bull Riding event.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Donnie Landis looks back as pickup man Blake West rides through the arena during the Ed Miller Xtreme Bull Riding event Thursday, June 10, 2021, at the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show in Union. Landis has served as a rodeo clown throughout the Northwest for nearly 50 years.

According to Chad Hutsell, stock contractor, none of this would be possible without endless hours of behind-the-scenes work.

"Everybody works hard, and they gotta love it to do it," he said. "Everyone that is here is passionate about the sport and wants the event to go as best as possible, so that's why we work hard."

As many as 30 people worked to transport, sort and

move the animals over the course of the day, including 46 bulls from various owners. According to Hutsell, everyone working at the rodeo helps each other throughout the event, from transporting the animals to releasing them into the arena to making sure that the bulls don't injure the riders.

For bullfighter Sean Peterson, a Summerville native

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4A BASEBALL

Tigers earn all-state honors

Six La Grande players named to 4A all-state team

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Class 4A selection committee voted six of La Grande's top baseball players to the 2021 4A all-state team for their overall performance this past season.

La Grande's 2021 all-state nominations are first-team pitcher Riley Miller, second-team pitcher Jace

Schow, first-team catcher Cole Jorgensen, second-team infielder Devin Bell, first-team outfielder Payton Cooper and second-team utility player Nick Bornstedt.

"It's pretty impressive to have that number of kids coming from the program," head coach Parker McKinley said. "It speaks loudly to the respect those kids have earned around

the state through their play and how they conduct themselves."

The Tigers came up one game short of winning the 2021 4A state championship, losing in the championship game 5-2 to Hidden Valley. A walk-off grand slam in the bottom of the seventh inning lifted the Mustangs.

La Grande ended its season with a 14-2 record and averaged just under 14 runs a game.

Miller was a consistent ace on the mound for the Tigers, going 5-1 on the season with 46 strikeouts and a 0.48 ERA in 29 innings.

In what McKinley described as one of Miller's best performances of his career, the senior right-hander held Hidden Valley to one run over six innings in the state championship game.

"There were a lot of people watching that game that were really impressed," McKinley said. "The fact that he's going to play at the next level and continue his career, all that points to being a first-team guy."

Miller is signed to play collegiate baseball for Clark College in Vancouver, Washington, which competes in the Northwest Athletic Conference.

Schow joined Miller on the list of La Grande pitchers to be named to the all-state list, making the second team. The sophomore starter finished the season with a 3-0 record, 2.07 ERA and 21 strikeouts over

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SPORTS SHORT

Report: Former Oregon State baseball coach could be headed to LSU

By NICK DASCHEL
The Oregonian

CORVALLIS — Former Oregon State baseball coach Pat Casey may be headed for LSU to replace retiring coach Paul Mainieri, according to a report.

DIBaseball.com reports it has sources claiming Casey, who won three national titles during his 24-year Oregon State tenure, has emerged as the leading candidate at LSU.

The Oregonian/OregonLive attempted contacting Casey for comment, but he did not respond.

Casey, 62, retired as coach in 2018, and has since worked in Oregon State's athletic department as a special assistant to

athletic director Scott Barnes. Casey is currently under contract at OSU through June 2022. Casey is slated to make \$630,000 during the final year of his deal.

At the time of his retirement press conference, an emotional Casey was conflicted about retiring. Casey wasn't certain that he was finished as a coach, but said "my problem is what I expect out of my players on the field is what I expect out of myself. Right now, I'm not positive I can give them the same effort."

Casey was eventually replaced in 2019 by Mitch Canham. Oregon State recently finished its 2021 season when it lost in the Fort Worth Regional

championship game to Dallas Baptist.

LSU won the Eugene Regional on Monday and takes on Tennessee in a three-game super regional this weekend.

LSU athletic director Scott Woodward has some familiarity with Casey, as he was previously AD at Washington during Casey's Oregon State tenure.

Casey's record at OSU was 900-458-6. Combined with a seven-year stint at George Fox before taking over at OSU in 1995, Casey has won nearly 1,100 games as a college coach. Under Casey, the Beavers won national titles in 2006, 2007 and 2018, and played in six College World Series.



Nati Harnik/Associated Press, File

Former Oregon State coach Pat Casey walks in front of the dugout in the ninth inning of an NCAA College World Series baseball elimination game against LSU on Saturday, June 24, 2017, in Omaha, Nebraska.