

HOOPS

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say enough about how resilient our boys have been.”

One major element in playing so many games close together is rallying the team after a loss. In a normal season, coaches would have days after a loss to study film, practice new strategies or even learn from previous mistakes. In the 2021 season, teams often have to adjust and improve in the next game.

“You have to be able to learn what you need to learn from it, and then forget the negativity about a loss,” Miller said. “Then we have another opportunity to lace up the next day within 24 hours and take advantage of that.”

While the season has been challenging in many ways, coaches and players are still glad to just have a season at all. The general consensus of coaches, players, fans and even referees I’ve spoken with is a feeling of gratefulness that the indoor sports season wasn’t canceled as a whole.

Athletes in particular have been very resilient facing the adversity of a constantly changing timetable for the season. Coaches, parents and athletic directors have done their best to make the season possible and that should be applauded.

While every team has faced a number of challenges this season, it has been sink-or-swim across the board. Teams that can rally from losses quickly and make adjustments on the fly are the ones that are experiencing success so far this season. As the postseason approaches, the teams that are the most resilient will make it the furthest.

Davis Carbaugh covers news and sports for The Observer. He can be contacted at dcarbaugh@lagrandeobserver.com.

ON THE SLATE

SATURDAY, JUNE 12

Prep boys basketball

Pine Eagle at Enterprise, noon
Wallowa at Enterprise, 3 p.m.

Prep girls basketball

Wallowa at Enterprise, 1:30 p.m.

Prep wrestling

La Grande at 4A-SD4 District Wrestling Championship, La Grande, 10 a.m.

MONDAY, JUNE 14

Prep boys basketball

Powder Valley at Enterprise, 2:30 p.m.

Union at Nyssa, 4:40 p.m.

Nixyaawii at La Grande, 5:30 p.m.

Joseph at Grant Union, 6:30 p.m.

Prep girls basketball

Nixyaawii at La Grande, 1 p.m.

Powder Valley at Enterprise, 1 p.m.

Joseph at Grant Union, 5 p.m.

TUESDAY, JUNE 15

Prep boys basketball

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

Crane at Powder Valley, 2 p.m.

Prep girls basketball

Vale at La Grande, 5:30 p.m.

Crane at Powder Valley, 3:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16

Prep boys basketball

Crane at Enterprise, 1:30 p.m.

Crane at Joseph, 6 p.m.

Prep girls basketball

Crane at Enterprise, noon

Crane at Joseph, 4:30 p.m.

THURSDAY, JUNE 17

Prep boys basketball

Powder Valley at Joseph, 3:30 p.m.

Union at La Grande, 6 p.m.

Prep girls basketball

Powder Valley at Joseph, 2 p.m.

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

Prep wrestling

La Grande at SD4 District Meet, Gladstone High School, TBD

FRIDAY, JUNE 18

Prep girls basketball

Baker City at La Grande, 5 p.m.

Damascus Christian at Powder Valley, 5 p.m.

SATURDAY, JUNE 19

Prep boys basketball

Joseph at Grant Union, 3 p.m.

Prep girls basketball

Powder Valley at Grant Union, 1:30 p.m.

RODEO

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and 10-year bullfighter, the job seemed like a perfect fit.

“It comes naturally to me. I’ve always liked being around cattle and I’m fairly athletic, so I decided to combine the two,” he said.

Peterson has been bullfighting professionally for five years, which has taken him to rodeos all over the Pacific Northwest. He said that he is grateful for the opportunity to live out his dream and make a living from it.

“When he first started, I had a hard time with it because it was hard for me to watch,” Peterson’s mother, Connie Buchanan, said. “And as he became better and better and more skilled and more respectful of the bulls and became a professional, then it was easier.”

The reality of bullfighting is there’s a limit on how long people can do it before their bodies can no longer handle it. According to Buchanan, Peterson particularly realized this after COVID-19 forced rodeo cancellations last year.

“The thing about it, though, is you get a year older each time,” Buchanan said. “And so, he has to be more agile and quick.”

Donnie Landis, a rodeo clown from Idaho, isn’t so worried about age. He’s been a professional rodeo clown since 1978 — with



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Cowboys and bullfighters rush to save a downed rider during the Ed Miller Xtreme Bull Riding event Thursday, June 10, 2021, at the Eastern Oregon Livestock in Union. Bull riders need to last at least eight seconds on top of the bulls to score — but inevitably all riders will fall off, leaving bullfighters to safely distract the bull away from the downed cowboy.

no plan to slow down anytime soon.

“The crowd here is super hospitable, and I hope to come here until I’m 100 years old,” he said.

Between riders and stages of competition, Landis ensured that the audience was always entertained. A bull owner himself, Landis first started bullfighting and performing when he was 12 years old. Now 61, he said he still looks forward to EOLS every year.

“The Eastern Oregon Livestock Show and rodeo is one of the best rodeos in the Northwest, and it’s a pleasure being part of it,” he said. “The country, the terrain, around here is awesome, and it’s super fun being around the crowd here.”

Landis said many audience members don’t understand the connection between the livestock and

the bullfighters and riders.

“There’s a lot that goes into this livestock that some people don’t understand,” he said. “People care about these livestock like some people care about their kids.”

Landis said it’s that respect that makes rodeos so important to keeping the culture of rural areas alive. As a fourth-generation rodeo cowboy, he said he has a responsibility to continue the tradition.

He’s not the only one with this mindset.

For West, who grew up in Union, the yearly livestock show serves as a reminder to uphold the legacy of rodeo life ingrained in him.

“I grew up with this rodeo, and I remember being 8 years old looking up at these guys. So every rodeo I go to, I try to create a good image for the younger generation,” he said.



First baseman Nick Bornstedt catches a pickoff attempt at first base during a game last season. Bornstedt earned second-team 4A all-state honors at the utility position after hitting .567 on the year.
Michelle Bell/
Contributed Photo

BASEBALL

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20-1/3 innings pitched.

Jorgensen, a junior, earned first-team catcher honors after hitting .643 at the plate, tallying 32 RBIs and scoring 10 runs. Jorgensen played a major part in the Tigers’ playoff run, going 4-for-9 at the plate in the postseason.

“First-team for Cole as a catcher is maybe one of the most impressive ones for me, just because the catcher position is so loaded with quality talent right now at the 4A level,” McKinley said. “To have him stand out on that list has been really cool.”

Cooper excelled in the outfield to earn him first-team honors. The senior hit .424, finished with 17 RBIs and scored 23 runs. McKinley called Cooper a “special talent” at the leadoff spot for La Grande.

“What he was able to do consistently over the course of the season and through the playoffs, all those things pointed very clearly to being a first-team selection,” he said.

Bell, a junior short-

stop, was named to the second-team all-state infield following a solid offensive year in the batter’s box and on the diamond defensively. He hit .462 at the plate, knocked in 15 runs and scored 35 runs during the 2021 season. Defensively, Bell was a part of four double plays and recorded 26 putouts.

Bornstedt earned second-team utility honors, serving as La Grande’s designated hitter. The junior hit .567, finished with 10 RBIs and scored 10 runs.

Of the six Tigers awarded all-state honors, only Miller and Cooper are graduating seniors. The remaining four all-state players will be back on McKinley’s squad next season.

McKinley said completing the season under the pandemic circumstances is an accomplishment for the program and La Grande High School athletics as a whole.

“It really is a program-wide performance,” he said. “It makes me proud to be a part of it and have those kids represent our school and our town.”

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