

HIGH SCHOOL WRESTLING



Klel Carson/Contributed Photo

Junior wrestler Braden Carson, left, stands next to La Grande High School wrestling coach Klel Carson and freshman Kai Carson. The duo of wrestlers each brought home a district title in their weight classes as Carson coached the Tigers to a district championship on Saturday, June 12, 2021.

All in the family

Family ties run deep for La Grande wrestling team

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Not many dads get the front-row seat that Klel Carson had when his son, Braden, won the 126-pound weight division at the 2020 Class 4A state championship.

Carson, La Grande High School's wrestling coach, now has two sons competing on the team at a high level. For the Carson family, wrestling provides a special bond between father and sons.

"They kind of grew up in the program," Klel Carson said. "It's been a part of the whole family and it's just really rewarding being able to coach them and have the best seat in the house for their accomplishments."

Klel Carson has been coaching wrestling for 28 years, which has made the sport a big part of the family. Braden's younger brother, Kai, began wrestling when he was around 4 years old and now gets the chance to compete on the high school team. The freshman recently won the 120-pound weight division at the OSAA 4A Special District 4 meet on Saturday, June 12.

For Braden Carson, the goal for his junior year is

back-to-back state championships. He took the district crown in the 138-pound weight division and improved to 10-0 on the season.

Braden and Kai Carson are poised to compete at the 4A state championship on Friday, June 25, and Saturday, June 26. La Grande is coming off its first wrestling title since 1996 last season, with Braden Carson returning as the reigning champion in the 126-pound weight division.

Whether it be wrestling or activities at home, the Carson brothers are always competing. Klel Carson noted that a spikeball match or board game at the Carson house can become heated. Even though the family is competitive, the brothers use that to help each other improve in the sport.

"I like having my brother there as a partner there to push me," Kai Carson said. "There's a lot of wrestling talk when we go home."

Klel Carson's daughter, Alaina, was a six-time all-state athlete across soccer and softball at the high school level. He joked that if the brothers get too confident in their achievements, there are trophies and medals from their older sister lying around as a reminder to stay humble.

Coaching is about more than just teaching wrestling for Klel. He also strives to help his athletes become strong individuals who are

prepared to have successful lives.

"After practice, we always have a talk about being good people and growing up to be good husbands and fathers," he said.

For Klel Carson, the culture on the La Grande wrestling team comes down to creating a close-knit mentality, whether that involves his own kids or the many athletes he has coached over the years.

"It's a big family, and the whole team atmosphere is what we try to create as coaches," he said.

Outside of wrestling, the off switch for the Carsons involves bonding outside of the sport they all know and love.

"We won't talk about sports sometimes and we'll just play family games and have fun," Braden Carson said.

That competitive mentality can be difficult to switch off as an athlete when the coach lives under the same roof. For Braden and Kai Carson, quality family time comes down to things like fishing, golfing or family game nights when the brothers are away from the wrestling mat.

"I'm mostly proud of their work ethic and the kind of kids they are more than anything," Klel Carson said. "Wrestling is wrestling, but I'm more proud of how they do at school and how hard they work and that kind of stuff."

Young LHS squad ready for state

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A year removed from the school's first wrestling state championship since 1996, there's a new younger crowd leading the La Grande wrestling team this year. State champions Gabe Shukle, Parker Robinson and Christopher Woodworth all graduated, leaving the Tigers with crucial spots to fill heading into this season. With younger faces came the same discipline and success under head coach Klel Carson.

The Tigers dominated the 4A Special District 4 tournament, scoring 302 points and crowning five individual district champions. La Grande outscored second-place Baker by 109 points and impressed the home crowd with a team title.

"They're young, but they're tough," Carson said.

Of La Grande's five individual district champions, three were underclassmen and four underclassmen finished in the top three in their weight class. Leading the young group of wrestlers this season is senior Braxton Bisenius and junior Braden Carson.

Bisenius defeated Ontario's Ruben Hernandez to take the 152-pound crown and improve to 10-0 on the season. Braden Carson, the reigning 126-pound 4A state champion, earned a district title in the 138-pound weight division to improve to 10-0 on the season.

Having lost key pieces from last year's team, Bisenius and Braden Carson know the importance of the younger wrestlers performing well for the team.

"Being a team leader is a big deal," Braden Carson said. "It takes everybody and we hold each other accountable and we get people to show up to practice on time and everything like that."

In La Grande's district championship run, sophomores Joshua Collins and Wyatt Livingston won individual titles. Collins defeated Isaac Wood of McLoughlin/Weston-McEwen to take the gold in the 132-pound division, while Livingston beat teammate Cole Shafer in the 170-pound finals. Both sophomores improved to 9-0 on the season heading into the 4A state championship on Friday, June 25, and Saturday, June 26.

"It's really good for the future and they're stepping up right off the bat which is really cool," Klel Carson said.

Wrestling comes naturally for Kai Carson, son of Klel and younger brother of Braden, but his immediate impact this season made a big difference in the team's success. Kai Carson took the 120-pound dis-



The Observer, File

La Grande's Braden Carson tries to break the grip of Tillamook's Quintin Metcalfe on Saturday, March 2, 2020, during the 126-pound final in Portland in his state-title victory. Carson heads to the 2021 4A state championship on Friday, June 25, and Saturday, June 26, looking to become a two-time state champion.

trict crown and the freshman improved his record to 9-1 on the season.

"I kind of saw it as like we were coming in to fill that gap," Kai Carson said. "It was high intensity and a lot of high expectations for the season."

Leading a young team proved even more difficult this year during the COVID-19 pandemic, but Bisenius and Braden Carson were able to push through the obstacles.

"It's been a little bit more tricky this year because we're not at school all the time with each other, so we have to reach out more and stay connected outside of wrestling," Braden Carson said.

The 2021 wrestling season was pushed back into the spring, alongside basketball and swimming this year. For Bisenius, the path to a state championship involves competing in wrestling even after graduating on Saturday, June 5.

"You just have to control what you can and then don't worry about what you can't," Bisenius said. "Whenever we can practice, whenever we can work, we're getting ready for the state championship."

With such a young group, Bisenius and Braden Carson know the importance of preparing the younger athletes for the high stakes of the state championship.

"With the lack of experience, specifically in a state tournament which is a lot more intense, helping them get ready for that environment is how we can be ready to repeat from last year," Bisenius said.

The Tigers are set to travel to Cascade High School in Turner to compete on Friday, June 25, and in the final rounds on Saturday, June 26. As reigning state champions, the few upperclassmen on the roster will look to lead a young group back to glory in this year's competition.

"They're training really hard and I like the opportunity that we have," Klel Carson said.

KICK-START YOUR NEXT PROJECT

Fund home improvements by taking advantage of your home equity. Choose a home equity line of credit or cash-out refinance.



Learn how your home equity can work for you at

[HZCU.ORG/EQUITY](https://hzc.org/equity)
800.852.5316



OAC. Membership fee and restrictions may apply. NMLS #414459

Growing Generations Together

Our Bank was Founded by Farmers & Ranchers

who saw a need for banking services in Rural areas. We remain Independent and are Committed to the success of our Rural Communities, and *we love being a part of Growing Your Generations Together.*

Bank of Eastern Oregon's Mission has always been to provide Financial Support for the Ag Industry.

La Grande
LOANS / BRANCH
2514 Cove Avenue
541-624-5040
9 AM-5 PM: MON-FRI



KRISTY NELSON
Ag & Commercial Loan Officer



DAVID STIREWALT
Ag & Commercial Loan Officer



Bank of Eastern Oregon
Member FDIC 

Rates & terms may vary. All loans subject to credit approval. NMLS #414459