



Ronald Bond/Wallowa County Chieftain

Imbler's Garrett Burns is shown during a match at the Jo-Hi Invite on Thursday, June 3, 2021, in Joseph. Burns repeated as 2A/1A state champion, winning the 120-pound division during the OWA state championships last weekend in Sweet Home.

Making history

Imbler wrestler Garrett Burns becomes program's first two-time state champion

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

SWEET HOME — An Imbler wrestler accomplished something that has never been done before in the program's past.

Junior Garrett Burns made history at the 2A/1A state championship tournament, becoming the first Imbler wrestler to win multiple individual state championship titles. Burns defeated Central Linn's Blake Owens by a 6-2 decision to win the 120-pound weight class on Saturday, June 26, at Sweet Home High School.

"It felt just as good winning it last year, but with a much different atmosphere," Burns said. "The state meet is the state meet and you have to go out and fight for it."

Past successes create championship mentality

As a sophomore, Burns claimed the 113-pound title after pinning Pine Eagle's Coy Butner in the championship round of the 2020 2A/1A state tournament. After a tumultuous offseason due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Burns took the 120-pound title in 2021 nearly 16 months later.

"He knows what you have to do and he made it happen this year," Imbler wrestling coach Doug Hislop said. "He had confidence from last year, but he's humble."

In the 120-pound division, the championship came down to the two top-seeded titans of the division. Burns entered as the top seed and Owens was slated as the second seed. Both wrestlers cruised through the early rounds on a collision course for a

finals matchup, with Burns pinning his first three opponents, including an eight-second win in the first round.

Owens gave Burns his toughest test of the tournament, forcing a 6-2 decision. According to Hislop, Burns had the upper hand throughout the match, but in wrestling the results can turn quickly.

"He controlled the match the entire time, but he was wrestling against a really good kid, too," Hislop said.

Burns held out against any kind of come-from-behind effort from Owens and claimed his second straight individual state championship.

Leading the pack on the mats

Burns went 9-1 on the season, only losing to La Grande's Kai Carson at the La Grande Throw-down on May 28, 2021. In a six-week delayed season, Imbler was only able to rally four wrestlers to compete. Even so, Hislop and the Panthers managed to place 18th out of 48 schools in attendance at the state championship.

"He's a super leader," Hislop said. "He spent a lot of time helping his teammates and he's really blossomed this year."

One of Burns' teammates, Alex Hunter, also made history becoming the first Imbler freshman to qualify for a state meet. Not only did Hunter qualify, but he defeated Zoe Vickers of Oakland High School in the first round to become Imbler's first freshman wrestler to win a state tournament bout. Hislop credits Burns for being a major factor in helping Hunter improve throughout the season.

"I was really pleased with (Hunter), and I think that he is going to keep improving in his career," Hislop said.

For Burns, having a small team made it difficult to train. His younger teammates improved by practicing against the reigning champion, but Burns had a hard time practicing against wrestlers with different skill sets.

"It was challenging sometimes," Burns said. "Just trying to find people to practice with and be competitive was something I had to overcome this year."

When it came time for postseason wrestling matches, Burns channeled a competitive head space to recreate the success from the season before.

"My mindset was to go in and just get it done," Burns said. "Making Imbler history was the main drive. Making everyone proud and making history was all that was in my head."

With title, Burns cemented himself in the history books of the Imbler wrestling program.

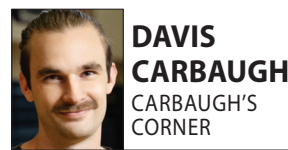
"I knew it was going to take a good kid to beat him this year," Hislop said. "Wrestling is a sport where you get out what you put in."

Eyes set on a third championship

As the program's first two-time state champion, Burns has his eyes set on bringing home a third title in his senior season.

"My goal is go undefeated next year and get back to where I was at the state meet this year," Burns said. "I'm just focusing on getting back to the grind and trying to get three straight."

Olympic excitement reaches Eastern Oregon



DAVIS CARBAUGH
CARBAUGH'S CORNER

The 2021 Olympic Track and Field Trials are a special time of year, whether you live in Oregon or not. It was my first trials as an Oregon resident, and Eastern Oregon University standout Isaac Updike competed in the steeplechase.

Although Updike recorded the fastest time in the preliminary rounds, he finished fifth in the finals and came up just two spots shy of booking a trip to the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. Following along in his journey on the national scale was a rewarding experience as a reporter.

Updike clocked in at 8 minutes, 24.72 seconds, three seconds slower than his qualifying time. Even falling short of the Olympic threshold, Updike still maintains the fastest steeplechase time by an American this year at 8:17.74.

Hillary Bor, an eighth-place finisher at the 2016 Olympics, got the upper hand on Updike and won the event to represent the United States in Tokyo. Benard Keter and Mason Ferlic took second and third after overtaking Updike on the final lap. Keter, a former runner at Wayland Baptist University, competed against Updike and EOU at the NAIA level.

The connection between Updike and Keter shows how the running community can be a small world, with former small-school rivals competing on



Chris Pietsch/The Register-Guard

Former Eastern Oregon University athlete Isaac Updike leads a pack of runners across a jump during his heat of the 3,000-meter steeplechase on Monday, June 21, 2021 at the U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials at Hayward Field in Eugene. Updike finished fifth in the steeplechase finals and missed the Olympics by two spots on Friday, June 25, 2021.

a world scale at the trials.

Updike wasn't the only one in Eugene with Eastern Oregon ties.

Former Enterprise High School star David Ribich, a Western Oregon University grad, competed in the men's 1,500-meter run. Ribich finished 12th with a time of 3:44.43 in the final round after placing fifth in the semifinals at 3:38.75.

Simply having the trials back in Eugene after being canceled in 2020 due to COVID-19 was a thrill for fans and athletes alike. Speaking with Updike after his race and learning about his journey from EOU to the top ranks of the sport really illustrated the working-man's attitude that many of these track and field athletes embody.

A year later than originally planned, track and field competitors will join athletes from other sports in the Tokyo Olympics starting with the opening ceremony on Friday, July 23. While it comes as a relief to have the Olympics back, it also creates

a quicker turnaround for Updike and other athletes who came up just short this year. The Paris Olympics will still take place in 2024, which gives Updike a shorter wait until he has a chance to qualify again.

The next big focus for Updike is the 2022 World Athletics Championships at the newly renovated Hayward Field in Eugene. The legendary complex was torn down in 2018 and completed in April 2021, just in time for the Olympic Trials. Updike will look to qualify and compete against the world's elite athletes at the event.

Coming up just short of the Olympics was a disappointment for Updike, but taking the national stage in athletics is still quite the achievement.

Hearing "Eastern Oregon University" over the loudspeakers at Hayward Field during a globally televised event shines a light on athletes from our neck of the woods and is a testament to Ben Welch and the track and field program at EOU.

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