

La Grande swimmer sets high expectations

Sophomore Glenn Ricker continues to add accolades despite injury

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Glenn Ricker has competed for only two seasons for La Grande High School, but he has accomplished more than most do in their entire swimming careers.

A 100-yard butterfly champion as a freshman, Ricker concluded the 2021 season with his fourth and fifth trips to the podium at the Class 4A/3A/2A/1A state meet last month in Cottage Grove.

“Going back to state was all about getting the technique down and gaining that muscle memory,” he said.

Overcoming some early-season troubles

As a freshman, Ricker was a crucial part of La Grande’s fourth-place team finish at the Class 4A/3A/2A/1A state meet. Ricker won a state title in the 100-yard butterfly, took third in the 100-yard breaststroke and helped La Grande’s 200-yard medley relay team place second.

With such success so early in his career, the expectations were high for Ricker coming into his sophomore season. That all changed when Ricker suffered a broken arm just weeks before the swim season began. In addition, the pandemic delayed the 2021 season into the spring instead of its normal duration during the winter, which made training together as a team a difficult task.

“They handled it so well and had great attitudes the whole season,” La Grande swim coach Lisa Chewning said. “It was



The Observer, File

La Grande’s Glenn Ricker was the state champion Saturday, Feb. 22, 2020, in the boys 100-yard butterfly at the Class 4A/3A/2A/1A swim meet in Beaverton. Following a broken arm before the start of the 2021 season, Ricker finished second in both the 100-yard butterfly and 100-yard breaststroke at the 2021 state meet on Saturday, June 26, 2021.

strange competing in the spring, but I think they had great attitudes and rolled with the punches.”

For Ricker, the regular season was put on hold as he recovered from the severe arm injury. However, he recovered quickly and returned to the pool just weeks later.

“It was hard,” Ricker said. “Taking time off from swimming, there’s nothing exercise-wise you can do instead to keep your muscles going.”

According to Ricker, he started training in the pool and swimming four days per week after three weeks off due to his injury. The week before the district meet, he ramped up the training to about

two hours per day.

Fighting through a severe arm injury

Ricker competed in the Greater Oregon League District Swim Championships on Saturday, June 19, and dominated the field. Despite very little training time coming in, Ricker finished first in both the 100-yard butterfly and the 100-yard breaststroke.

Just a week later, Ricker was back on the podium at the state meet with runner-up finishes in both events.

“He’s really talented and works hard,” Chewning said. “I think pulling off second-place finishes

with just a few weeks of swimming is really impressive.”

Jake Weigand was the only other boys swimmer at the state meet for La Grande, and the duo combined for 50 points and a 13th place team finish out of 20 schools competing. Weigand placed sixth in the 100-yard breaststroke and ninth in the 200-yard IM.

“I was happy with getting second after having to take time off,” Ricker said. “The guys who beat me worked really hard for those championships.”

Building the program with family connections

In addition to his individual

success, Ricker is focused on building the boys swimming program in his remaining two years with the team.

Ricker’s younger brother, Zane Ricker, is joining the team as a freshman next year and will add to a legacy of Rickers on the La Grande swim team. Older sisters Romayne Ricker and Laramie Ricker and older brother Caden Ricker were major pieces of the program in years past.

“I’m hoping I can keep doing well and bring some more people out to the team next year,” Glenn Ricker said. “My goal for next year is to just train harder, drop some time and win state again hopefully.”

The boys swim team will look to improve upon its 13th place state finish and qualify more swimmers for the state meet next season. Chewning knows that Ricker is a crucial part of those efforts.

“He’s a really good role model, even at a young age, because of his work ethic,” Chewning said.

According to Ricker, his summer will consist of training and getting back into the form he was in prior to the arm injury. The 2022 high school swim season will be back on schedule in the winter months, making it a quicker turnaround in the off-season than in typical seasons.

For Ricker, the bar is set high for the upcoming seasons due to his accomplishments through his first two years of high school swimming. With five trips to the state podium so far, the La Grande swimmer will be a favorite to win a gold medal next year.

“I think he can win state again and potentially have the opportunity to swim in college if that’s what he wants to do,” Chewning said.

Ducks to welcome full house for games this fall

Capacity crowds will be allowed to watch Oregon at Autzen Stadium

By **RYAN THORBURN**
Eugene Register-Guard

EUGENE — Autzen Stadium is officially open for business again.

The University of Oregon announced last month the 54,000-seat venue will allow fans at full capacity for the 2021 season, which begins Sept. 4 when the Ducks host Fresno State.

During an interview with The Register-Guard a month before the announcement, athletic director Rob Mullens said he was cautiously optimistic fans would return to Autzen en masse.

The Ducks played only two home games during the 2020 season in front of cardboard cutouts and empty seats due to state-



Chris Pietsch/The Associated Press, File

The Oregon Marching Band displays a giant United States Flag on the field at Autzen Stadium on Oct. 11, 2019, in Eugene. The University of Oregon announced in June 2021 the 54,000-seat venue will allow fans at full capacity for the upcoming season, which begins Sept. 4 when the Ducks host Fresno State.

wide health and safety restrictions stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I have been riding on the hope wave for quite a while, and I’m still on the hope wave,” Mullens said.

“I am hopeful that vaccination is in fact the path to a full Autzen.”

Gov. Kate Brown announced Wednesday, June 30, the end of state-wide health and safety

restrictions, allowing Oregon’s athletic department — facing a \$55 million deficit for the fiscal year that ended June 30 — to welcome paying customers to flood through the turnstiles again.

Oregon typically makes between \$3.5 million and \$4 million per football home game.

Face coverings will not be required to attend games at Autzen, but unvaccinated fans are encouraged to wear them. Proof of vaccination will not be required, nor will sections be designated for specific vaccination status, according to Oregon.

“I want to express our gratitude to Gov. Brown and her staff as well as to the Oregon Health Authority and Lane County Public Health for all of their diligence and collaboration throughout this process, as we collectively worked to ensure the health and safety of our student-athletes, coaches, staff and fans,” Mullens said in a statement. “This is an exciting time for Oregon Athletics, and we are anxious to kick off the 2021 season in a packed Autzen Stadium.”

Fourth-year coach Mario Cristobal, who received a new six-year, \$27.3 million contract before the Ducks

won their second consecutive Pac-12 championship in December, has built one of the most talented rosters in program history entering the fall.

Oregon, which plays a marquee nonconference game Sept. 11 at Ohio State, will also host Stony Brook (Sept. 18), Arizona (Sept. 25), California (Oct. 15), Colorado (Oct. 30), Washington State (Nov. 13) and Oregon State (Nov. 27) this season.

“We are just getting started, and I am fired up to relentlessly work and build upon the success so far,” Cristobal said after his contract extension was approved by the board of trustees. “We are privileged to call Oregon home, and we love the sense of family and community here at Oregon.”

“We will continue to work tirelessly to elevate the Oregon football program to the next level, and we can’t wait to see the best fans in the nation back in Autzen Stadium next fall.”

SPORTS SHORT

Former OSU star leaves \$1,000 tip at Portland IHOP

By **ARON YOHANNES**
The Oregonian

PORTLAND — Chad Johnson is a generous man.

One of the most entertaining players the game of football has ever seen, Johnson shares much of that same flair off the field.

He showed that off Friday, July 2, while dining locally in Portland.

The former Oregon State star was at an IHOP near Portland International Airport get-

ting his usual unhealthy slate of food. This time in the form of pancakes, where his bill at the restaurant totaled \$33.53. His tip? A massive \$1,000.

The tip didn’t come without a final message, however. The star wide receiver left a little jab for Portland Trail Blazers star Damian Lillard.

“I beat Damian Lillard in 1 on 1 year ago in the YMCA,” Johnson scribbled.

A Cincinnati Bengals legend, Johnson has left gen-

erous tips of that amount before. He told The New York Post he’s been doing it for 20 years.

Once during a visit in Houston, he left a \$1,300 tip on a \$107.17 bill at James Harden’s Thirteen Houston restaurant. He left another \$1,000 tip at Houston’s Turkey Leg Hut.

No official video proof of Johnson’s 1-on-1 victory against Lillard is out there (yet). Until then, we’ll have to take his word for it.



Gail Burton/The Associated Press, File

Former Cincinnati wide receiver Chad Johnson, front, runs the ball during a game in 2007. Johnson was at an IHOP near Portland International Airport on July 2, 2021, where his bill at the restaurant totaled \$33.53. His tip? A massive \$1,000.