

## WOMEN'S COLLEGE SOCCER

# Unfinished business at EOU

Experienced women's soccer standout Natalie Goeth returns to Mountaineers

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Natalie Goeth is back at Eastern Oregon University to finish what she started.

The 2017 honorable mention All-CCC defender left the program after her freshman year, but returns to Eastern to play her redshirt-senior season in La Grande. After spending three seasons at Arizona Christian University and earning her undergraduate degree, Goeth transferred back to Eastern to finish her career as a Mountaineer.

"I'm just looking to bring intensity," Goeth said. "At practice I'm able to bring competition and hopefully I'll play during the season and help the team get as far as we can go."

Goeth rejoins a women's soccer program at Eastern that is coming off a 3-2 first-round loss in the NAIA tournament. The Mountaineers compiled a 8-2-3 record in an abnormal spring season and qualified for the NAIA tournament for the fourth straight season. In her time away, Goeth still kept up with the successes of her former team.

"Seeing them doing better in recent years, I wanted to be a part of it again and finish where I started," she said. "Coming back had to do with the environment of the team and the competitiveness of the school and the players."

## Fitting back in

Head women's soccer coach Jacob Plocher is more than pleased to have Goeth back on the roster, noting that it also helps with the transition of this year's newcomers into



Natalie Goeth, No. 3, high-fives teammates during her freshman season with Eastern Oregon University in 2017. After spending three years at Arizona Christian University, Goeth transferred back to EOU to play her redshirt-senior season with the Mountaineers.

the program. Unlike incoming freshmen who take time to acclimate to collegiate athletics, Goeth is expected to fit right in as a veteran presence on the team.

"When she came in freshman year she was a great player for us and started almost every game," Plocher said. "I never wanted her to leave in the first place."

According to Plocher, the Eastern coaching staff was excited to build around Goeth back in 2017. She ultimately left in order to be closer to friends and family in the Arizona area. Plocher received a phone call from Goeth about two months ago expressing interest to rejoin the program. After three years away, Goeth is looking to jump right back into a Mountaineers team that is ranked No. 10 in the NAIA preseason coaches' poll.

"I think undoubtedly there's potential for the team to go back to Alabama this year and I hope we can make it farther than last year," Goeth said.

## Winning atmosphere

For Goeth, the team atmosphere and overall work ethic drew her back to La Grande.

"I really like all the girls and their attitudes toward practice," she said. "When I go to practice, it's something that everyone is excited to do. They just bring it, it's not something that's a chore."

Goeth's experience on the field will help her transition into the team's rotation according to Plocher. The defender started 11 games for Arizona Christian last season and was nominated as a Golden State Athletic Conference Scholar-Athlete.

Due to an injury-caused redshirt season at Arizona Christian in 2018, Goeth still has two years of eligibility remaining. Plocher says the plan is to take it year-by-year, as she studies for her master's degree of science in education at Eastern.

For the Mountaineers, Goeth brings two important aspects: versatility

and experience.

"She's a versatile player that we can plug in anywhere and she'll contribute," Plocher said. "She's a smart, feisty player with a great work rate who really fits in with players we have in the program."

After three years away, the return to the La Grande area is a welcome change for Goeth.

"I'm happy to be here and I like having that small-town feel again," she said. "It's nice to have that close-knit community and to see a lot of the people again."

The Mountaineers started their season against No. 3 Spring Arbor in a neutral site game in Prescott, Arizona, on Friday, Aug. 20. Two days later, Eastern will square off against the tournament host, Embry-Riddle. In her return to the Mountaineers, Goeth hopes to start the 2021 season on a good note.

"I'm expecting us to do well," Goeth said. "I'm hoping that we start the season 2-0 in Arizona."

# Return of the mask mandate



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CARBAUGH'S CORNER

Over the past couple weeks, school boards across Union County have faced difficult decisions regarding mask mandates in school. Due to the implication of potential fines and loss of teaching licenses for not complying, there is not much of a decision to be made.

With their backs against the wall, several school boards such as La Grande and Union have adopted plans for returning to school with masks required amid opposition from parents and community members.

While the health and safety of students is always the priority, sports will likely see an impact from the mandate as well. The Oregon School Activities Association, in accordance with Gov. Kate Brown's requirement for schools, announced that masks will be required for indoor sports and events this fall. Athletes and coaches are mostly used to those rules after last season, but the tension from parents against the mandate could have a ripple effect.

At local school board meetings, a number of parents have stated they will homeschool their children outside of their respective school districts. Not only does this impact the school's funding based on total enrollment, but it also adds eligibility issues for sports. Student-athletes who are home-schooled or learn virtually through the district may compete in sports this year, but students homeschooled outside of the district will not be eligible.

School enrollment also plays a factor in how divisions are implemented for sports, so there may be changes if a large number of parents take their children out of their districts.

For most athletic directors in the area, the masks are just a small hurdle in providing student-athletes with the best overall experience. Coaches and athletes just want to go out and compete, especially after a year filled with cancellations and shortened seasons.

The 2021 season offers hope for a much more normal sports environment compared to last year, but lingering issues over masks could prove to be a stumbling block.

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## SPORTS SHORT

# Washington State football coach says he intends to follow vaccine mandate

The Associated Press

PULLMAN, Wash. — Washington State football coach Nick Rolovich said Thursday, Aug. 19, that he intends to follow a new state mandate requiring COVID-19 vaccinations for all people working at the state's colleges and universities, including coaches.

Rolovich had said previously that he was not going to get the vaccine for personal reasons and did not explicitly say that he would receive a shot. "I'm just going to follow (the governor's) mandate," he said.

The mandate announced this week by Washington Gov. Jay Inslee also covers public,



The Associated Press  
Washington State head coach Nick Rolovich watches his players during football practice, Friday, Aug. 6, 2021, in Pullman, Washington.

charter and private school teachers and staff. It allows for religious or medical exemptions but does not

allow for a weekly testing alternative, and those who are not fully vaccinated by Oct. 18 risk losing their jobs.

Asked if he would wait for full FDA approval before receiving the vaccine, Rolovich repeated his plan to follow the mandate.

Rolovich is beginning his second season in charge of the Cougars. He participated in Pac-12 media day last month remotely after announcing his decision not to get vaccinated. His announcement had drawn attention from the top levels of the state government. Rolovich is one of two state employees making more than \$3 million, along with Washington coach Jimmy Lake.



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