

EOU season hangs in the balance

Mountaineers set for make-or-break game against Rocky Mountain

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — It's homecoming week at Eastern Oregon University, but the football team is all business heading into a critical matchup with Rocky Mountain College.

Coming off two straight losses, the Mountaineers host a Rocky Mountain team that is at the top of the Frontier Conference with a 4-1 record. Eastern's season is up in the air after a 3-0 start to the year, making this matchup a must-win for the Mountaineers.

"We've dropped two games in a row, but at the same time it doesn't stop the direction we want to go," head coach Tim Camp said.

The Mountaineers come into the contest off two straight rivalry losses, losing 24-7 against the College of Idaho on Sept. 25 and 24-3 at Southern Oregon on Oct. 2. Eastern's offense has stalled after a strong start to the season, scoring just 20 points in the team's last three contests.

The Battlin' Bears come into the game ranked No. 23 in the NAIA, practically switching spots with the Mountaineers. Eastern has climbed to as high as No. 11 in the polls this season, but finds itself on the outside looking in this week.

"Rocky Mountain is a good football team. They have good skill players and good players in the box," Camp said. "We just have to execute. It's really been us beating us lately."

A much-improved Eastern defense is allowing 21.4 points per game this year, but the offense's recent stagnancy has been the team's Achilles' heel. The Mountaineers are averaging 16.2 points per game this season, which ranks 81st in the NAIA. Rocky Mountain's average of 35.7 points per game is tops in the Frontier Conference and 27th in the NAIA. The Mountaineers will either need to match the offensive production of the Battlin' Bears or hope that the defense can limit the opposing team's points.

In Eastern's most recent loss to Southern Oregon, the Mountaineers gained just 51 total rushing yards in what was quarterback Kai Quinn's second straight game with 35 or more passing attempts. Quinn led the team with 23 net rushing yards and threw for 233 yards and two interceptions.

"The run game has been hit or miss, but more miss lately," Camp said. "There's plays out there to be made, we just have to make them."

In two straight rivalry games, a higher-ranked Eastern team found itself outplayed in difficult losses. Now in the role of the underdog, the Mountaineers will look to play a more balanced game on homecoming. Kickoff is slated for 1 p.m. at Community Stadium on Saturday, Oct. 9.

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Tigers take it one game at a time

La Grande seeks fourth win of season in matchup at Nyssa

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

NYSSA — The La Grande football team is getting closer and closer to its goal of winning its league.

After going down 12-0 early in a 35-20 win over Burns last week, the Tigers are not going to overlook a 1-3 Nyssa team in this week's matchup.

La Grande comes into this game 3-1 on the season, ranked No. 4 in the OSAA 4A standings. While the team may have lofty expectations once the playoffs start, all the focus at La Grande is on taking things day-by-day.

"We can't take them for granted or overlook them because they're 1-3," La Grande head coach Rich McIlmoil said of Nyssa. "We know they're going to come out and play hard."

It was a bounce-back win for the Tigers last week, garnering some momentum after a difficult 44-14 loss to top-ranked Estacada the week prior. La Grande got back in the win column against Burns, but it was far from smooth sailing at Community Stadium. The Tigers trailed early on, but rattled off a 35-8 run to close out the game.

"I think we learned a valuable lesson that we can't take anyone



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

La Grande's Cole Jorgensen (51) sacks Burns quarterback Dalhton Proffitt (19) during the Tigers' 35-20 win over the Hillanders at Community Stadium in La Grande on Friday, Oct. 1, 2021.

for granted," McIlmoil said. "A big thing we've talked about is just taking things one game at a time."

The return of running back and linebacker Brody MacMillan has been a major boost for La Grande, which was noticeable in the win over Burns. With the Tigers holding a narrow

21-20 lead in the fourth quarter, MacMillan broke free for two rushing touchdowns on consecutive drives to put the game out of reach. McIlmoil is confident in the team's rushing attack and what it can do for the offensive production.

"I really like to run the football because if you can control

the clock and run the ball, that opens up the pass game later," he said. "It's a high-percentage thing for me."

In last year's matchup, La Grande bested Nyssa 42-8 in the team's season opener. The Tigers will be aiming for a similar outcome as the team starts to eye the conclusion of the regular season.

Elgin and Enterprise face off in crucial matchup

Huskies, Outlaws set for 1A clash

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

ENTERPRISE — The Elgin football team finds itself at a crossroads this week.

The 2-2 Huskies will travel up to Enterprise to face off with an evenly-matched Enterprise team on Friday, Oct. 8, with the outcome tipping the scale between having a winning or losing record late in the season. The Outlaws come into the matchup 2-3 on the year, but are flying high after a 51-6 blowout win over Ione/Arlington.

In what could prove to be a tipping point for Elgin's season, head coach Kirt McClure and his players realize the magnitude of winning important league games.

"It's a huge game for us," McClure said. "We feel like we need to get this one."

The Huskies defeated Union 48-24 last week, despite limited playing time from star running back Joe Lathrop due to injury. McClure expects to have a full, healthy roster in the matchup with Enterprise. In Lathrop's absence, junior running back Bruce Morehead rushed for 212 yards and three touchdowns,



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

Elgin's Ty McLaughlin (24) gets pushed out of bounds by Crane's Cody Siegner (32) during a punt return at Community Stadium on Friday, Sept. 24, 2021.

and sophomore quarterback Ty McLaughlin ran for 271 yards and three rushing touchdowns.

"It all starts with the line, we've been saying that all week," McClure said. "We're going to try to push it right at them."

Enterprise brings its own efficient rushing attack into the game, behind senior Gideon

Gray. He ran for 165 yards and three touchdowns in the win over Ione/Arlington and will look to carry the load against Elgin this week. The Outlaws' 51-6 win over Ione/Arlington was the highest scoring contest the team has posted since a 50-12 win over Imbler in 2019. Enterprise will hope to sustain similar

offensive firepower when it hosts Elgin this week.

The matchup is pivotal for both teams as the postseason inches closer and closer. Kickoff is set for 7 p.m. at Enterprise High School.

POWDER VALLEY AT UNION — The Powder Valley football team is looking to bounce back this week after being humbled by a powerhouse Adrian team 38-0. The Badgers came into the matchup ranked No. 1 in the 1A rankings, but the No. 2 Antelopes showed why they were the 2019 state champions. Powder Valley was shut out for its first loss of the season.

Powder Valley head coach Josh Cobb emphasized that it is up to the players to respond to the difficult loss and get the season back on track. After the team's offense was completely stifled by a stout Adrian defense, the Badgers will look to lean on quarterback Reece Dixon in their performance against a winless Union team.

The Bobcats fell to 0-5 on the year after a 48-24 loss to Elgin last week and are still looking for the team's first win of the year. Kickoff between Powder Valley and Union is scheduled for 7 p.m. Oct. 8 at Union High School.

See, Prep/Page A8

SPORTS SHORT

Dye may have to shoulder the load

The Oregonian

EUGENE — Travis Dye had his most touches since 2018 during Oregon's loss at Stanford, and the fourth-year junior may need to continue to shoulder the load of UO's running game if CJ Verdell is out for significant time.

Dye had 19 carries for a season-high 96 yards and had a career-high four catches for 39 yards in the 31-24 overtime loss on the Farm.

"Like always, Travis shows up on game day," Oregon coach Mario Cristobal said. "Full speed, full throttle, tough, resilient, physical. Good in protection, real good

running the ball, good catching the ball. Elusive breaking tackles, tough guy, one of the best leaders on the team."

It was also the most rushing yards by Dye since his 33 carries for 199 yards, both still career-highs, against Oregon State in 2018. It was also his most total touches (23) since his 34 against OSU as a freshman.

"Travis is a warrior," quarterback Anthony Brown Jr. said. "Played his (butt) off. He made plays when we needed."

With Verdell (78 carries for 406 yards and six touchdowns) suffering an apparent left leg injury during the third quarter and being

carted off to UO's locker room, Dye might have to take a bigger share of the carries going forward.

When Verdell was limited for three games and then missed the final two games of last season with a thumb injury, Dye had 53 carries for 311 yards.

Even if Dye can handle more touches, who among Oregon's three freshmen running backs will be the next in line for a potentially big increase in their role is anyone's guess. Trey Benson, Seven McGee and Byron Cardwell Jr. have combined for 13 carries for 48 yards this season and each has been the third running back to take the field over the past three games.



Jed Jacobsohn/The Associated Press

Oregon's Travis Dye (26) walks off the field after losing to Stanford in overtime on Saturday, Oct. 2, 2021. The Cardinal won 31-24.