

PREP FOOTBALL

Tigers begin march to postseason

La Grande looks to keep momentum going against Ontario

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The La Grande football team is attempting to close out the season strong.

The Tigers have found their stride midway through the season, gaining two straight victories after a brutal 44-14 loss to Estacada on Thursday, Sept. 23.

Ahead of a matchup with Ontario, La Grande is keeping its eye on the prize.

“Having that league championship has been our goal from the beginning,” La Grande head coach Rich McIlmoil said.

The two teams play at 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 21, at Community Stadium.

Ontario is one of two league matchups left on the docket for a La Grande team looking to finish the season near the top of the 4A rankings. Recent victories over Burns and Nyssa have propelled the team to No. 7 in the OSAA rankings.

A heavy dose of rushing attempts combined with a hard-nosed defensive effort have been the key for McIlmoil’s squad this year. The emergence of running back Brody MacMillan has been a major positive to the team’s offense, while Cole Jorgensen has been an anchor on the defensive line.

Things are starting to peak at the right time for La Grande, who looked heavily outmatched



La Grande’s Brody MacMillan (11) looks for running room against the defense during the Tigers’ 35-20 win over Burns at Community Stadium in La Grande on Friday, Oct. 1, 2021.

Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

in the early-season contest against No. 1 Estacada. The offense went stagnant in the team’s only loss, but exploded for 35 points in the first quarter against Nyssa in what became a blowout victory.

“I felt like it was our best game of the season, to be honest,” McIlmoil said. “It was a whole team effort. Our offen-

sive line played super well.”

Ontario has struggled this year, going 1-5 so far. The team’s only win came in a 52-0 rout against McLoughlin on Oct. 8. In the team’s five losses, Ontario is being outscored 39-10.

Ontario lost to Baker in a contested 27-14 matchup last week, while La Grande was able

to take the week off for a bye. McIlmoil emphasized that the team is always training toward getting better, but that the bye week was good timing in terms of allowing injured players to heal.

“We’re never going to take a week off, but the bye will allow us to get back into playing shape,” McIlmoil said.

Powder Valley competes to secure No. 2 seed

Badgers host No. 5 Crane on Friday in regular-season finale

By **JEFF BUDLONG**
and **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
EO Media Group

NORTH POWDER — The stakes are high for Powder Valley.

The Badgers are looking to close out the regular season with a victory Friday, Oct. 22, in a matchup with No. 5 Crane. Not only will it give the Badgers a three-game winning streak heading into the postseason, but it will keep them on the opposite side of the bracket from top-ranked Adrian.

The second-ranked Badgers are coming off a 62-24 victory over Wallowa on Oct. 15. Powder Valley raced out to a 42-8 half-time lead and never looked back, getting contributions from players up and down the roster.

Freshman Tucker Martin provided a big spark last week with three touchdowns. Martin is back to full strength after dealing with injuries earlier in the year and provides Powder with yet another



Powder Valley wide receiver Kaden Krieger hauls in a pass in the Badgers’ win over Elgin on Thursday, Sept. 9, 2021.

Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

explosive option on offense next to a slew of upperclassmen.

“The team is feeling great,” head coach Josh Cobb said. “Got most bumps and bruises patched up the last few weeks.”

Powder Valley is 6-1 on the year, with the team’s lone loss

coming from Adrian on Oct. 1.

Fifth-ranked Crane improved to 6-1 with a 16-6 victory over Cove on Oct. 16. The Mustangs held an 8-6 lead before pitching a shutout in the second half, knocking out a pair of Cove quarterbacks. Crane’s only

loss came to Adrian 24-0 in its second game of the season, so it will also be aiming to avoid the Antelopes in the playoff bracket.

“We’re really looking forward to playing the Mustangs at Powder,” Cobb said. “They always have a bunch of strong, physical kids that play hard. Both teams will know they played a football game the next morning.”

Kickoff between the Badgers and the Mustangs is 7 p.m. Friday.

ADRIAN AT UNION — Union draws a tough opponent to close out the season with a home contest against top-ranked Adrian on Friday, Oct. 22. The Bobcats (1-6) do enter the game with momentum after getting their first win last week.

Union was able to break a 10-game losing streak with a 34-26 victory over Lyle/Wishram/Klickitat. The 34 points represented the most the Bobcats have put on the scoreboard this season.

The Antelopes (7-0) have not played since Oct. 8 when they handed Cove a 56-6 defeat. Adrian received a forfeit from Elgin on Oct. 15. A victory

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EOU takes aim at losing streak

Mountaineers face winless MSU-Northern

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Things have taken a rough turn for the Eastern Oregon University football team, but this could be a bounce-back week for the Mountaineers.

Coming off a bye week, Eastern will be looking for a win against an 0-7 MSU-Northern team on the road. While the Mountaineers have struggled offensively this year, the team will have a great opportunity to get back in rhythm in a matchup with the Lights on Saturday, Oct. 23.

“The bye week was exactly what the doctor ordered, getting some guys healthy and getting back to basics,” head coach Tim Camp said. “We got work done and worked on getting back to fundamental football.”

Eastern has floundered in its last three matches, dropping games to the College of Idaho, Southern Oregon and Rocky Mountain. The team’s last win came on Sept. 18 against Carroll College in a low-scoring 10-7 victory.

Offensively the Mountaineers have not scored 20 or more points in a game since a Week 2 victory over Montana Western by a score of 35-28. Eastern managed 17 points in the first half against Rocky Mountain, but six turnovers from quarterback Kai Quinn proved detrimental.

“We did it to ourselves, making mistakes that we need to clean up,” Camp said. “It’s up to us to make plays.”

The Mountaineers will look to take advantage of a MSU-Northern defense that is allowing just under 35 points per contest this year. The Lights are coming off a 42-14 loss to the College of Idaho, which dropped them to 0-6 in conference play. Even so, Camp and the Mountaineers are not overlooking the team’s upcoming opponent simply based on record.

“They have guys that can make plays. I think it will be a great Frontier Conference matchup,” he said. “They’re hungry for a win and so are we.”

Eastern’s defense has played admirably as a whole this year, but had difficulty slowing down Rocky Mountain quarterback Nathan Dick in the team’s most recent loss. Dick threw for four touchdowns and 224 yards and ran for an additional 123 yards on the way to a 34-17 rout.

While Quinn did what he could to spur the Eastern offense, risks taken in the pocket resulted in turnovers that killed momentum throughout the loss. However, he accumulated 201 yards passing and 82 yards on the ground.

If the redshirt-senior can

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SPORTS SHORT

EOU picked to finish second in preseason CCC coaches’ poll

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — There are high expectations this year for the Eastern Oregon University women’s basketball team, coming off a 16-4 record in the shortened 2021 spring season.

The Cascade Collegiate Conference opened its preseason women’s coaches’ poll, with Eastern projected at second in the conference with 127 points. Atop the conference projections with 142 points is Bushnell, the reigning conference champions.

The Mountaineers return a strong group from last year’s team that went 8-2 in con-

ference play. All-conference players Beverly Slater, Sailor Liefke and Taylor Stricklin will lead the way for an experienced Eastern squad this year.

Eastern edged out Lewis-Clark State, Oregon Tech and Southern Oregon, who round out the top five in the poll. The Mountaineers garnered one first-place vote.

The Mountaineers open their regular season on Friday Oct. 22, competing at the Simpson Basketball Classic in Redding, California. Eastern will play UC Merced on the first day of competition, followed by Simpson on the second day of action. Eastern’s home opener is set to take place against Whitman on Nov. 5.



Eastern Oregon’s Taylor Stricklin looks for a teammate during a contest in the 2020 season. Stricklin is a key returner for the Mountaineers this season, as the team was picked second in the preseason coaches’ poll on Tuesday, Oct. 19, 2021.

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