



DAVIS CARBAUGH
CARBAUGH'S CORNER

Tigers hit stride as playoffs approach

Not many teams have experienced the kind of continued success that the La Grande girls soccer team has under head coach Sam Brown.

The last time the Tigers lost a league matchup was in 2016 to Ontario, long before any of the current players on the roster were even in high school.

Since then, La Grande has won 26 straight league games by a combined score of 129-8. To say that La Grande is a powerhouse in the Greater Oregon League would be an understatement.

In addition to the sustained success at the league level, the Tigers have been hitting their stride late in the year. La Grande has won its last four matches in a row, each ending in a shutout.

The Tigers most recently exploded in an 8-0 victory against McLoughlin, on Tuesday, Oct. 19.

La Grande is anchored by two seniors in defense, but every other player on the roster is either a junior or younger. Juniors Rylie Huddleston, Sophia Petty and Rosie Aguilera have combined for a lethal attacking unit of forwards. Huddleston tallied two goals and an assist in the win over McLoughlin.

The Tigers are 9-2-1 overall this year and 5-0 in league play, with the only blemishes coming in non-league games against Pendleton/Weston-McEwen and Fruitland, Idaho. Fruitland and La Grande have had a pair of competitive matches this season. In a matchup at Community Stadium, the Grizzlies came back from three goals down to force a 3-all draw, and then they posted a 3-2 win over the Tigers at Fruitland.

After that loss, the Tigers have stepped on the gas and looked strong near the end of the year. Despite losing to Pendleton/Weston-McEwen early in the season, La Grande won 2-0 in a rematch on Oct. 11.

Seven of the team's last eight matches have been shutout victories, while La Grande's overall goal differential is 43-14. With just one game remaining at home, against Ontario on Oct. 26, the Tigers are poised to continue their league winning streak and carry that momentum into a playoff push.

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COLLEGE MEN'S BASKETBALL

A new era begins for Mountaineers

Strong returning group leads EOU basketball in Kemp's first season

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — It's a fresh new start for the Eastern Oregon University men's basketball program.

Former head coach Carlito Labarda Jr. is out, while former assistant coach Chris Kemp is taking over the reins of the program. The Mountaineers come into the season ranked No. 8 in the Cascade Collegiate Conference preseason coaches' poll, but the team is looking to surprise folks around the league.

In his first year as a collegiate head coach, Kemp will lean on a reliable group of returners as well as several key newcomers to the program.

"I have high expectations," he said. "I think we have high character and we have guys that play for each other. My goal is to compete every night and for that to translate to wins."

Kemp takes over as interim head coach at Eastern following four years as an assistant coach for the men's program and one year with the women's team. A major positive of the transition is the continued familiarity with the players, athletics department and the university, but Kemp is doing things his own way.

"I feel like I had this foundation where at least I knew the guys, but we are doing everything differently," he said. "We had to change the culture. I knew I wanted a lot of things to be the opposite as far as our culture and how the players are experiencing the program and this community."

Eastern is coming off a shortened season in which the team finished 8-12 overall and 3-9 in conference play, finishing sixth in the conference.

Taking over the helm of a program is never easy, but it helps to have eight players returning from last year's roster.

"Having that foundation of knowing the players gave me a sense of security and comfort level," Kemp said. "There was no feeling-out process. We were able to hit the ground running and get right to basketball."

McCullough leads the way

The centerpiece of the returning group is redshirt senior Max McCullough, the program's all-time leading scorer. Coming off a shortened spring season in which he averaged 21.1 points, 5.5 assists and 5.2 rebounds per game, McCullough is essential to the success of the program.

"We're leaning on him," Kemp said. "His word has credibility, so he is like an extension of me on the court."

With Labarda Jr. being released by the program, all signs may have pointed toward McCullough playing as a grad-



The Observer, File
Max McCullough of Eastern Oregon University controls the ball in a game against Evergreen State College during the 2019-20 season. McCullough, the school's all-time leading scorer, is part of a group of returning players this year.



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer
First-year head coach Chris Kemp organizes drills during a practice for the Eastern Oregon University men's basketball team on Friday, Oct. 15, 2021. Kemp was hired as the interim head coach of the program and hopes to improve upon the team's 8-12 record in last year's shortened spring season.

uate transfer elsewhere. However, McCullough was an advocate for the hiring of Kemp and is dialed in on helping the team succeed during his final season in La Grande.

"Eastern is a place I fell in love with and Kemp is someone I wanted to stick around for and be a part of in his first year," McCullough said. "I really want to win as many games as we can this year and get Eastern on the map nationally as a basketball school."

Having scored 2,061 career points so far, McCullough has had no issue making baskets from the guard position in his time at Eastern. However, a big emphasis in his game is his assist and rebound numbers, which have improved every

season.

With a strong group of guards returning for the Mountaineers, McCullough will look to continue spreading the love offensively this year. Additionally, several new pieces in the paint will allow Eastern to put more pressure on opposing defenses near the rim.

"Being a point guard, I like to exploit mismatches. Getting shooters open looks and working the bigs are a big part of adding to those assist numbers and making us all-around better offensively," McCullough said.

McCullough added that his personal goal for the season is to shoot 50% from the field, 40% from 3-point range and 90% from the free-throw line. Despite achieving numerous per-

sonal accolades over the years, the guard is more focused on leading the team to success in his final year with the program.

"This is one of the most talented teams I've been a part of," he said. "I definitely think we can compete with some of the best teams in the league. There really is no limit with this team."

Key returners are crucial

In Kemp's first year as head coach at Eastern, several familiar faces will continue to be crucial contributors on both sides of the ball. Junior Zane Wright was second on the team last season with 14.9 points per game, while shooting over 46% from the field and just over 44% from beyond the arc.

Wright and McCullough are joined in the backcourt by junior transfer Phillip Malatare, red-shirt freshman Paul Pennington, senior Brandon Porter and junior transfer Manny N'tula.

"I think depth-wise, it's something that could really benefit us throughout the season compared to last year," Wright said.

Through a plethora of capable guards on the roster, Eastern has the ability to attack opposing defenses in a variety of ways. With McCullough's floor spacing and Wright's lethal shooting from long range, the Mountaineers are confident in this year's backcourt.

"I think we're capable of anything we want to be capable of," Wright said. "From what we've seen, we expect to be competing for a trip to nationals."

Newcomers add much-needed depth

A recent issue with the Mountaineers has been a lack of length and size in the low post.

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SPORTS SHORT

Trail Blazers star makes NBA's list of top 75 players

By ARON YOHANNES
The Oregonian

PORTLAND — Damian Lillard has another accolade to add to his accomplished NBA career.

The Portland Trail Blazers star was named to the NBA's 75th anniversary team on Tuesday, Oct. 19, which honors the top 75 players in NBA history during the league's 75th season.

Because of a tie in voting, 76 players actually made the final list.

Lillard, 31, is a six-time NBA All-Star with six All-NBA selections in his career.

Lillard is currently in his 10th NBA season, all of which have been in Portland. He's arguably the greatest player in

Blazers franchise history alongside Clyde Drexler. Lillard is currently second behind Drexler on the Blazers' all-time scoring list at 16,835 points and is in the top five of several statistical categories in franchise history.

Drexler was revealed on the list after Wilt Chamberlain on day two of the unveiling Oct. 20.

Other notable former Blazers to make the list are Bill Walton, Scottie Pippen, Lenny Wilkens and Carmelo Anthony.

Lillard and the Blazers fell to the Sacramento Kings 124-121 in their season opener Oct. 20.

They look to notch their first win under new coach Chauncey Billups on Oct. 23 against the Phoenix Suns.



Steve Dykes/The Associated Press, File
Portland guard Damian Lillard, center, passes the ball as Denver forwards Paul Millsap, left, and JaMychal Green, right, defend on May 29, 2021.