

WRESTLING

Continued from Page A8

“He’s a great kid and a great leader that works really hard,” he said. “He expects a lot out of his teammates. We really missed him last year.”

While MacMillan and Braden Carson will lead the way on and off the mat as seniors, a rising group of wrestlers set the tone as underclassmen last season. La Grande scored six top-six finishes from underclassmen, two of whom were top three.

Sophomore Kai Carson placed third in the 120-pound weight class after winning the district title, and junior Joshua Collins took second place in the 132-pound division as a sophomore. Collins is looking to improve on the momentum of last season and continue to improve as an upperclassman.

“I’m trying to build on what I learned last year and implement it,” Collins said. “The goal is to ultimately win state, but my mental goal is also to not give up the middle of the mat and keep working through.”

Sophomore Mason Wolcott returns after placing fourth at the 106-pound division last spring, while juniors Brysen Penaloza, Wyatt Livingston and Cole Shafer all placed in the top six in the state as sophomores. Klel Carson also expects big contributions from Jarrett Armstrong, Noah McIlmoil, Dominick Carratello and a number of other wrestlers in this year’s deep group.

“We’re just trying to keep up the work and continue where they left off last year,” Klel Carson said. “There’s



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Head coach Klel Carson spars with senior Braden Carson during a practice at La Grande High School Tuesday, Nov. 23, 2021. The La Grande senior is aiming to capture his third straight individual state championship.

high expectations in this room, which is good.”

The Tigers kick things off at the Ranger Classic in Estacada on Saturday, Dec. 4. The team will host the Mulenburg Tournament at La Grande on Dec. 10, welcoming in other top opponents to La Grande for an early-season competition.

Coming into the year with a large group of experienced wrestlers on this year’s La Grande team, the Tigers have their sights set on another state title. Building on recent success in the program, the athletes will look to hold the program to a high standard.

“Year in and year out, the expectation is always there,” Klel Carson said. “It’s awesome when they look around and see state placers and the history of this program and know that they can have similar success.”

La Grande looking to establish girls wrestling dynasty

The La Grande girls

wrestling program has an exceptionally high number of participants this year — roughly 16 wrestlers will hit the mat this season for the Tigers.

First-year head coach Max Mejia stated that he is ecstatic to see the large turnout and aims to build up the La Grande girls wrestling program in the years to come.

“It’s exciting,” Mejia said. “We’re going to have one of the biggest teams in the state. To have this many first-year athletes is great.”

Mejia is in his first full year as the head coach for the Tigers, coming to La Grande from Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he coached women’s wrestling at Augsburg University. He is an assistant coach at Eastern Oregon University.

Leading the way for the Tigers is junior Delia Gulzow, a state placer in 2019-20. She is one of a handful of upperclassmen on this year’s roster that

will be guiding the team.

La Grande’s roster is made up of roughly two thirds underclassmen. Mejia will be looking to build up a high volume of freshmen entering into the program that he believes can be the foundation of the program in years to come.

“It’s a really promising thing,” Mejia said. “We’ve got a lot of freshmen that are really tough.”

Mejia stated that the team is paying attention to detail well and learning fast. Some underclassmen on the team have experience with the La Grande mat club or in middle school.

The coach expects his team to make some noise around the state this year.

“I think they’re capable of great things,” Mejia said. “I would like to keep all 16 wrestlers this season. This is all brand-new for us.”

As La Grande looks to build up its girls wrestling program, Mejia hopes that the state will sanction the sport in order to open more doors for girls wrestlers in Oregon. He noted that La Grande’s hefty schedule and high turnout is very promising for the sport.

“La Grande School District is a pioneer in girls wrestling,” he said.

The Tigers get the season started on Saturday, Dec. 4, at a tournament in Homedale, Idaho. La Grande will travel to several tournaments, including Sweet Home and Riverside/Boardman. The team will also mirror the boys team’s schedule for duals this season.

BOYS

Continued from Page A8

“By no means is it going to define our season, but I think at the same time it’s going to give us a really good idea of where we currently stand,” Carollo said.

Carollo expects solid contributions from his numerous upperclassmen, as well as several newcomers who did not compete in the shortened spring season last school year. He also noted that building off the momentum of a strong football season will help create a winning mindset

among the team.

As the 2021-22 season gets underway, the Tigers will lean on its deep group of upperclassmen to learn and grow as the season progresses. If everything falls into place, La Grande could find itself competing at the state level by the end of the season.

“There’s some kinks we still need to work on right now, but the group of guys have a really strong camaraderie,” Carollo said. “Hopefully, we’ll be able to identify a brand of basketball that we want to play so we can be playing at our best by the end of the year.”

GIRLS

Continued from Page A8

The Tigers started the season with a difficult matchup right off the bat when they hosted Nyssa on Dec. 1. The Bulldogs went 9-5 last season, and 6-foot-5 junior Gracie Johnson is set to return at the center position.

“That will be a good test the first night,” Wright said. “They were a final-four team last year and they’re bringing a lot of kids back.”

The Tigers will also travel far and wide for several 4A games this year, meeting Molalla and Estacada on a weekend trip early in December

and facing four straight opponents on the road in January. Wright is hoping that tough 4A contests throughout the year will prove worthwhile at the end of the season.

“You have to play those teams and hopefully do well to get your ranking up and position yourself well for the playoffs,” he said.

While there are plenty of new names on the team’s roster and several star players to replace, La Grande is gearing up for another run at the Greater Oregon League and the 4A state tournament.

“I think we’ll be fine,” Wright said. “My expectation this year is to compete.”

SWIMMING

Continued from Page A8

The Tigers have several up-and-coming freshmen on the boys side who Maszk says could make an immediate impact. Glenn Ricker’s younger brother, Zane, is a freshman who will be a strong swimmer for La Grande this year along with Drake Adair.

“We have a lot of young

talent on both sides this year,” Maszk said.

On the girls side, the Tigers will be leaning on a handful of returners who contributed as underclassmen last season.

Chloe and Shiloh Lynch are two standouts to watch this year, alongside McKinley Kruse and a number of other strong returners.

Last season, Shiloh Lynch won the 100 backstroke at the Greater Oregon League Dis-

trict Swim Championships with a time of 1:12.28 and placed second in the 50 free at 27.31.

Maszk noted that having more swimmers on the team will provide some flexibility in putting relay teams together, which could go a long way for team scoring.

“We’re looking forward to having more numbers, which will definitely help our overall score,” she said.

Returning to the 2021-22

season with a much more typical offseason, La Grande swimmers are aiming to take a big step as a team this year. With added depth, first-year head coach Maszk is in a good position for a repeat in the Greater Oregon League and a competitive showing at the state tournament.

“We know that we’re a state-ready team,” she said. “I think everyone has the expectation that we will go and be competitive there.”

An Independent Insurance Agency



Reed & ASSOCIATES
Trusted Insurance Help Since 1994

**Get Trusted,
Friendly, Expert
Medicare Insurance
Help**



10106 North C St. • Island City
541-975-1364 • Toll Free 1-866-282-1925
www.reed-insurance.net



Beautyrest BLACK®

★★★★★

"Very well made, extraordinarily comfortable and it looks great too!"

Check out beautyrest.com for more great reviews!

BLACK FRIDAY EVENT

SAVE

UP TO

\$2000

on BEAUTYREST BLACK® and BEAUTYREST BLACK® HYBRID mattresses.* See store for details.

Special Financing Available

(541) 963-4144
Toll Free 888-449-2704

HOURS:
Mon. - Fri. 9:30 am-6:30 pm
Sat. 9:30 am-5:30 pm
Sun. Noon - 4:00 pm

© 2013 La-Z-Boy Incorporated

FREE DELIVERY FREE SET-UP FREE REMOVAL



1520 ADAMS AVENUE, LaGRANDE, OREGON 97850

- Free Delivery
- In-Store Credit
- 70 Store Buying Power
- Decorating Assistance