

HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL



Dallee Jo Bingham (15) looks to pass at Powder Valley High School on Friday, Dec. 3, 2021, during a loss to visiting Jordan Valley. The Badgers are coming off a 9-6 record in the pandemic-shortened spring season.

Alex Wittwer/The Observer

ON CAMPUS

Eastern men drop close contests

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

KLAMATH FALLS — It was a difficult weekend for the Eastern Oregon men's basketball team, dropping consecutive games by single digits.

"We just haven't been able to put a full game together yet," head coach Chris Kemp said. "We needed a couple key stops both nights we just couldn't get."

The Mountaineers were bested 70-67 on Friday, Dec. 4, just one day before falling 80-71 to Oregon Tech. The losses dropped Eastern's record to 5-5 overall and 0-3 in Cascade Collegiate Conference play, but the team is starting to find its identity in the absence of standout guard Max McCullough.

Transfers Phillip Malatare and Xavier Lovelace have been the one-two punch for Eastern so far this year, giving the team versatility at both the guard and forward positions. The duo combined for 74 points and 27 rebounds through the two weekend contests.

Malatare has proven that he is a capable scorer, but the matchup with Southern Oregon showed how gritty of a guard he can be. The junior scored 11 points and tallied five assists and eight rebounds. Lovelace carried the load scoring in the game against the Raiders, leading the team with 18 points and nine rebounds. He added 17 points and six rebounds in the loss to Oregon Tech.

The two transfers have helped carry the load for the Mountaineers thus far, as the team still searches for an identity at the start of conference play. As the team continues to gel and overcome injury issues, Malatare and Lovelace will be essential for the Eastern men's hoops team as the season progresses.

"I am excited to get home for some games and see if we can start to build some momentum," Kemp said.

Eastern will have nearly two weeks off before hosting Lewis-Clark State on Dec. 17. Tip-off is scheduled for 7 p.m.

Liefke pours in career-high 38 points

KLAMATH FALLS — Just two quarters away from a weekend sweep, junior Sailor Liefke had different plans for the Eastern Oregon University women's basketball team.

Following a 55-47 loss at Southern Oregon on Dec. 3, the Mountaineers trailed 48-38 heading into the second half of a matchup with Oregon Tech on the following day. Liefke went off for a career-best performance with 29 points in the second half, which gave her 38 points on the night.

The career performance was a part of an offensive explosion for the Mountaineers, who outscored the Owls 52-36 in the second half to take a 90-84 victory. The incredible offensive performance helped Eastern improve to 5-6 overall and 2-1 in conference play.

Liefke shot 13-for-22 from the field and hit nine out of her 10 free-throw attempts. Her defense was also stellar, tallying a game-high six steals. The Mountaineers scored 24 points off turnovers.

The win is much needed for Eastern as conference play gets under way. After eight straight road games, the Mountaineers will look to build on the victory after a two-week hiatus from games. Eastern is set to return to La Grande and host Lewis-Clark State at 5:30 p.m. on Dec. 17.

See, EOU/Page A8

CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

Young, athletic Powder Valley squad returns six players from last year's team

By JEFF BUDLONG
For The Observer

NORTH POWDER — Armed with depth but guiding a youthful team, Powder Valley head coach Allen Bingham is cautiously optimistic coming off a 9-6 pandemic-impacted campaign last season.

The Badgers will have to replace three starters, including standout Belle Blair, but the experience gained should benefit the team this season.

"It was a fun season because we had a lot of games and not many days for practices," said Bingham, who is in his 20th year leading the Badgers. "They had that tournament (at the end of the season) in Baker which we got to go to and take third. I was very excited we got to play in the spring because the players got a chance to compete and grow."

Bingham said the tournament atmo-



Jacey Anderson (10) dribbles into position at Powder Valley High School on Friday, Dec. 3, 2021. The North Powder girls basketball team lost to visiting Jordan Valley 47-23.

Alex Wittwer/The Observer

sphere, even if it wasn't the traditional state tournament, served his younger players well. The Badgers have six players who took part last season back on this year's squad. The goal every season for the Badgers is to advance through districts and make it to the state tournament.

Juniors Dallee Jo Bingham and Maddy

Leggett are the two returning starters who will be asked to help lead the team. Dallee Jo Bingham will be key in the post for a team that does not sport a ton of size in the paint, while Leggett will play on the wing.

"They are pretty consistent, solid

See, Girls/Page A8

BADGERS FOCUSED ON ULTIMATE GOAL

Powder Valley will rely on deep group of upperclassmen to compete for Class 1A state title

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

NORTH POWDER — After coming up just one touchdown shy of winning the Class 1A state championship this fall, Powder Valley is back for the upcoming basketball season looking for similar success on the hardwood.

A majority of the basketball team, all upperclassmen, were a part of the football squad's run to the championship game. With a deep, athletic group leading the way for Powder Valley, head coach Kyle Dixon is looking forward to a strong season.

"We want to make it all the way to the end. I think we can have a good year," he said. "If we just keep together, we should be fine."

The Badgers are made up of six seniors and five juniors, four of whom are 6-foot-3-inches or taller. Leading the way in



Kaiden Dalke (22) leaps for a layup at Powder Valley High School on Friday, Dec. 3, 2021. Dalke will look to be a staple in the Badgers' 2021-22 season on the hardwood.

Alex Wittwer/The Observer

the starting lineup are Reece Dixon, Kaden Krieger, Case Olson, Cole Martin and Clay Martin. Coming off the bench is Kaiden Dalke, a senior who can heat up from 3-point range.

Powder Valley has speed

and size, which can prove crucial at the 1A level. After a long football season, Kyle Dixon is not overly concerned with the players getting back into their top basketball form.

"They're young," he said. "It

just comes down to dribbling the ball again and hitting it hard at practice."

The Badgers have a variety of offensive weapons, including

See, Boys/Page A8