



The Observer, File

The La Grande High School football team takes on Pendleton in this photo from the 2016 season. The Oregon School Activities Association finalized its new classifications and districts on Monday, Dec. 13, aligning Pendleton in the Greater Oregon League with the Tigers.

## Oregon not expecting any more opt-outs

### Ducks enter Alamo Bowl against Oklahoma without four starters

By JAMES CREPEA  
The Oregonian

EUGENE — Oregon's roster for the Alamo Bowl is likely set, albeit without four starters and a fifth player on the two-deep.

All-American edge rusher Kayvon Thibodeaux, starting X receiver Devon Williams and starting field cornerback Mykael Wright have all declared for the NFL Draft and opted out of playing in the bowl game. Starting boundary cornerback DJ James and backup defensive tackle Jayson Jones entered the transfer portal.

Offensive lineman Malaesala Aumavae-Laulu will remain in the draft but play for the No. 14 Ducks (10-3) against No. 16 Oklahoma (10-2) on Dec. 29 (6:15 p.m.,

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# RIVALRY RENEWED

## La Grande coaches expect little scheduling change, increased competition from new OSAA reclassification

By DAVIS CARBAUGH  
The Observer

**L**A GRANDE — The La Grande Tigers officially welcomed in a new member of the Greater Oregon League last week.

The Oregon School Activities Association finalized its new classifications and districts on Monday, Dec. 13, aligning Pendleton in the Greater Oregon League. While the two teams have played as nonleague opponents across most sports in recent years, the new alignment brings a heightened level of competition to the 4A level and officially renews a rivalry.

"Any time we have to add a team, you want it to be a competitive team," La Grande baseball coach Parker McKinley said.

Pendleton has a strong track record across high school sports, adding a set of competitive teams to La Grande's league schedules in years to come. The Buckaroos went 9-2 in football this fall and made the 5A playoffs, losing to Dallas in the first round. La Grande's recent success on the gridiron will now have to go through Pendleton if the Tigers hope to repeat as Greater Oregon League champions.

### Buckaroos on deck

On the diamond, the addition of Pendleton to the Greater Oregon League would add a baseball powerhouse alongside the Tigers. The Buckaroos went 15-3 in the 2021 spring season and split the season series 1-1 against La Grande.

"I think it'll be good for our league,"



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

La Grande High School baseball coach Parker McKinley leads the dugout during a game between the La Grande Legacy Ford Legends and the Baker Bulldogs on Friday, July 23, 2021. Following the OSAA reclassification announced in December, Pendleton will compete against the Tigers in the Greater Oregon League.

McKinley said. "We kind of know what to expect. They're tough every year and their kids play hard."

McKinley noted that Pendleton's record at the 5A level speaks for itself and that the Buckaroos will improve the landscape of 4A baseball. The teams will likely match up four times per year now, with each team hosting two home games.

McKinley said that the addition of Pendleton would likely result in the Tigers adjusting their pitching strategies mid-season in order to plan ahead for the Buckaroos.

"It's like playoff baseball every time we play," he said.

### Clean sheet

For head coach Sam Brown and the La Grande girls soccer team, a heightened level of competition is seen as a good sign. The Tigers have dominated the Greater Oregon League for over a decade in girls soccer and now welcome one of their top competitors into the newly aligned league.

Brown noted that, like other sports, the girls soccer team previously faced Pendleton in nonleague matchups. The difference will be playing the Buckaroos twice every year, as opposed to once or twice a year based

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## ON THE SLATE

- THURSDAY, DEC. 23**  
**PREP BOYS BASKETBALL**  
 Weston-McEwen JV at Elgin, 2:30 p.m.
- PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL**  
 Weston-McEwen at Elgin, 1 p.m.
- MONDAY, DEC. 27**  
**PREP BOYS BASKETBALL**  
 Wallowa vs. Stanfield, Echo High School, 2:30 p.m.  
**2021 Baker Holiday Basketball X-Over, Baker High School**  
 Union vs. Adrian, 11 a.m.  
 Powder Valley vs. McLoughlin, 2 p.m.
- PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL**  
 Wallowa vs. Stanfield, Echo High School, 1 p.m.  
**2021 Baker Holiday Basketball X-Over, Baker High School**  
 Union vs. Adrian, 12:30 p.m.  
 Powder Valley vs. McLoughlin, 3:30 p.m.
- TUESDAY, DEC. 28**  
**PREP BOYS BASKETBALL**  
 Wallowa vs. Condon, Echo High School, 2:30 p.m.  
 Joseph at Ione/Arlington, 3:30 p.m.  
 Imbler at Weston-McEwen, 7 p.m.  
**2021 Baker Holiday Basketball X-Over, Baker High School**  
 Union vs. McLoughlin, 12:30 p.m.  
 Powder Valley vs. Burns 8 p.m.
- PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL**  
 La Grande vs. Henley, Sisters Holiday Shootout, Sisters High School, 3 p.m.  
 Wallowa vs. Condon, Echo High School, 1 p.m.  
 Joseph at Ione/Arlington, 2 p.m.  
 Imbler at Weston-McEwen, 4 p.m.  
**2021 Baker Holiday Basketball X-Over, Baker High School**  
 Union vs. McLoughlin, 2 p.m.  
 Powder Valley vs. Burns, 9:30 p.m.
- WEDNESDAY, DEC. 29**  
**PREP BOYS BASKETBALL**  
 Joseph at North Lake/Paisley, 2:30 p.m.
- PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL**  
 Joseph at North Lake/Paisley, 1 p.m.
- THURSDAY, DEC. 30**  
**PREP BOYS BASKETBALL**  
 Joseph at Dufur, 1:30 p.m.  
 Sherman at Wallowa, 4 p.m.  
 Stanfield at Enterprise, 4:30 p.m.  
 Four Rivers at Cove, 4:30 p.m.  
 Union at Weston-McEwen, 7:30 p.m.
- PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL**  
 Joseph at Dufur, noon  
 Sherman at Wallowa, 2:30 p.m.  
 Stanfield at Enterprise, 3 p.m.  
 Four Rivers at Cove, 3 p.m.  
 Union at Weston-McEwen, 6 p.m.

## SPORTS SHORT

# Liefke named Cascade Collegiate Conference player of the week

By DAVIS CARBAUGH  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — After a strong performance last weekend, a Mountaineers women's hoops standout took home conference honors.

Eastern Oregon University's Sailor Liefke earned Cascade Collegiate Conference women's basketball player of the week on Monday, Dec. 20. The junior averaged 15.5 points over two contests and led the Mountaineers to wins over Walla Walla and previously undefeated LC State.

Liefke was pivotal in the win over LC State on Dec. 17, totaling 16 points, five rebounds and two assists in 33 minutes of action. The game came down to the wire,

but a 3-pointer by Adyson Harris with seven seconds left tipped the game in favor of the Mountaineers.

The win brought Eastern level to 6-6 on the year, while handing LC State its first loss of the year after a 9-0 start.

On Dec. 18, Liefke had another strong performance as the Mountaineers cruised to a win over Walla Walla and improved to 7-6. Liefke scored 15 points in just 19 minutes and hit four three-pointers. On the weekend, she shot just over 40% from the field.

Eastern is riding a three-game winning streak and will look to keep the momentum going during a weekend road trip on New Year's Eve. The Mountaineers face Corban at 5:30 p.m. on Dec. 31 and play Bushnell at 3 p.m. on Jan. 1.



Eastern Oregon University/Contributed Photo

Sailor Liefke (22) drives toward the basket on Saturday, Dec. 4, 2021, against an Oregon Tech defender at Klamath Falls. Liefke earned Cascade Collegiate Conference women's basketball player of the week on Monday, Dec. 20, 2021.