

TOP HONORS

La Grande football, girls soccer haul in all-state honors



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

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

La Grande's Cole Jorgensen (51) sacks Burns quarterback Dalton Proffitt (19) during the Tigers' 35-20 win over the Hillanders at Community Stadium in La Grande on Friday, Oct. 1, 2021.

By DAVIS CARBAUGH

The Observer

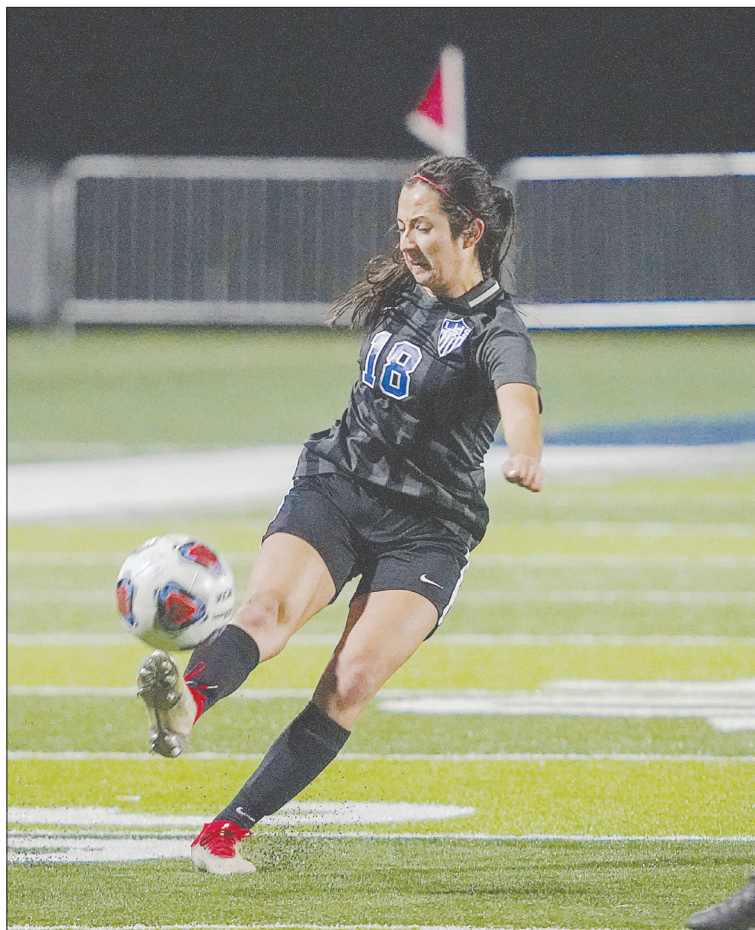
LA GRANDE — It was a strong showing for fall sports at La Grande, with both the football and girls soccer team making solid runs in the teams' respective playoff brackets. With standouts leading the way, several local La Grande athletes earned 4A all-state honors at the conclusion of the fall sports season.

After a strong year in which the Tigers football team went 7-2 and made it to the 4A quarterfinals, four players were nominated for all-state teams. Seniors Cole Jorgensen and Brody MacMillan led the way, earning a spot on both offense and defense.

Jorgensen was dominant in the trenches for the Tigers this year, earning first-team defensive line. He was also an anchor on the offensive side of the ball, taking home honorable mention at the offensive lineman position.

MacMillan's return to the football field after a serious leg injury last spring provided a huge spark for La Grande's offense. The 5-foot-10-inch, 210-pound running back's bruising rushing style became the identity of La Grande's successful offense as he garnered a spot on second team. Had MacMillan played the additional two games and racked up even more stats, it is likely that he could have earned first-team honors.

On defense, MacMillan was a key part of a Tigers' unit that held opponents to fewer than 20 points per game. He earned honorable mention at the linebacker position to join Jorgensen with honors on both sides of the ball. La Grande's defense got stronger



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

Rosie Aguilera (18) kicks the ball out at Community Stadium in La Grande on Tuesday, Nov. 2, 2021. Aguilera was named Greater Oregon League player of the year at the conclusion of the 2021 season.

as the season went on, holding Baker to seven points in the regular-season finale and limiting Gladstone to 12 points in a 34-12 victory in the first round of the 4A state playoffs.

Senior Nick Bornstedt earned honorable mention at the center position, while junior Noah McIlmoil was awarded honorable mention at tight end.

Two losses to Estacada were the only things stopping La

Grande this year, as the Tigers cruised through every other opponent. A commanding 20-point victory on the road at Baker sealed La Grande's sole possession of the Greater Oregon League title en route to the sixth seed in the playoffs.

The Tigers dominated the Greater Oregon League all-league nominations, totaling 13 total spots on offense and defense. Jorgensen was named

defensive player of the year and MacMillan earned offensive player of the year.

La Grande graduates seven seniors, but 18 juniors from this year's roster are set to return to compete next year.

Two La Grande girls soccer players earn all-state

LA GRANDE — The votes have been tallied and two La Grande girls soccer standouts were nominated for 4A all-state recognition.

La Grande junior Rosie Aguilera earned a spot on the 4A first team, while senior Susanna Durvik was selected to the second team. The pair led the way for another strong year of girls soccer at La Grande High School, with the season ending in the quarterfinal round of the 4A state playoffs.

The La Grande girls soccer team kept up its dominance at the league level, cruising to another Greater Oregon League title. The Tigers went 11-3-1 on the year and earned the fifth seed in the 4A state playoffs. Riding a five-game winning streak into the playoffs, La Grande defeated Corbett 1-0 in the first round but was upended by Woodburn 2-0 in the quarterfinals.

Durvik's presence on the field will be missed, alongside graduating senior teammate Bethany Brock. The Tigers have a huge group of returning players, many of which had central roles this past season. Aguilera will be the key piece alongside nine rising seniors. The Tigers also have two rising juniors and five rising sophomores that contributed to last year's success.

COVID-19 impacts sports season again

Outbreaks force EOU opponents to cancel wrestling, hoops events

By JEFF BUDLONG

For The Observer

LA GRANDE — Something returned to Eastern Oregon University's athletic schedule that the school wishes could have been left behind in 2021 — forfeits due to COVID-19.

The women's basketball team will not play either home Cascade Collegiate Conference game this weekend, against Warner Pacific and Multnomah, because of outbreaks in those programs. The men's game with Warner Pacific also was canceled while the Multnomah contest on Saturday, Jan. 8, is still on. The wrestling team lost a dual with Warner Pacific scheduled for Jan. 12.

"It is really disappointing, but it is something that we are all dealing with," said Anji Weissenfluh, Mountaineers head women's basketball coach and EOU athletics director. "It could and most likely will happen to all of us because the new variant is highly contagious."

Conference COVID-19 guidelines state that anytime a school elects not to participate or has been required to cease based on federal, state or county mandate, the contest will be a forfeit for record and standing purposes.

"It doesn't feel good to win by forfeit," Weissenfluh said. "It never feels good to any coach or team. Student-athletes and coaches do this because they love this and they want to play."

The EOU women's basketball team sits at 10-7 overall and 7-2 in conference play after receiving the pair of forfeits. It is the third forfeit the Mountaineers have received this season after Corban forfeited a Dec. 31 contest. The men are losing a game because of COVID-19 for the first time this season.

Weissenfluh said the start-stop nature of seasons during the pandemic can create problems with conditioning for all athletes. The Mountaineer women are not scheduled to return to the court until Jan. 14 when they travel to Kirkland, Washington, to take on Northwest.

This is the time of season when teams are looking to make their mark in conference play and begin to ramp up for postseason action, Weissenfluh said.

The Mountaineer women did not practice on Thursday, Jan. 6, and Weissenfluh said they are evaluating the best way forward. That could include practices or even giving the players the weekend off.

"The health and safety of our players is most important," she said.

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Class 1A schools concerned with potential changes

Small-school coaches, leaders put off by plan to reorganize football

By NIK STRENG

The Oregonian

PORTLAND — During a Wednesday, Jan. 5, meeting of the Oregon School Activities Association's Football Ad Hoc Committee, coaches and administrators from Oregon's Class 1A schools voiced concerns over a proposal that could completely change how small-school teams operate.

In December, the ad hoc committee met and officially supported a reorganization of the state's smallest football teams. This would combine Oregon's 2A and 1A schools into three groups: a nine-man football Division 1 classification mostly made of 2A teams, a nine-man football Division 2 classification made of smaller 2A teams and bigger 1A teams, and a six-man football classification for the smaller 1A programs. Teams



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

Powder Valley's Casey Vaughan (4) and Kaden Krieger (5) lead the team onto the field at Baker High School on Nov. 27, 2021, during the OSAA 1A state title game.

that do not want to participate in nine-man leagues would have the option to compete in Class 3A.

During that Dec. 20 meeting, representatives from 2A schools said they would support the move to nine-man football. Nestucca

head coach Jeff Schiewe said it would be better than an eight-man game.

But one thing that the 1A representatives agreed on Jan. 5 was that there was not enough representation from 1A schools when making

this decision.

"After visiting with a lot of the 1A schools, we feel like eight-man football should be a 1A decision," Powder Valley High athletic director Brad Dunten said. "But the last proposal that came from the ad hoc football committee, it was like we were getting pushed out of what our tradition and what we want as a classification."

Dunten surveyed athletic directors at other 1A schools. Of the 80 responses he received, 95% said they would prefer to play eight-man football rather than nine-man football. And the number of responses showed how passionate 1A schools are on the matter, Powder Valley Superintendent Lance Dixon said. "1A schools have not been the most unified and come together in a large format matter to represent 1A until this nine-man proposal came out," Dixon said.

Another frustration raised surrounded finances. Billy Wortman, the football coach and principal at Adrian High School, noted that many small rural schools save money by having volleyball and

football teams travel together to play at league opponents. A complete redistricting would increase the number of buses needed, thus increasing travel costs.

Also, any changes to nine-man football would limit playing options because it would eliminate out-of-state competition, since Washington and Idaho do not have nine-man football.

Wortman also voiced concerns over the OSAA sponsoring the six-man league, saying many eight-man teams would drop to six-man. He said there needs to be a roster cap in place in six-man to make sure that teams aren't dropping down in hopes of competing for a state championship when they could otherwise play eight-man games.

Oregon has been running a pilot six-man league for four years. The teams compete for an unofficial state championship, which is organized by the teams involved. The state canceled its six-man league in 1960, creating eight-man football in order to create more opportunities to play for student-athletes.