

OSAA alters winter state title schedules

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

WILSONVILLE — The Oregon School Activities Association announced an update to its winter sports schedule on Thursday, Jan. 20, modifying championship formats in the midst of the recent spike in COVID-19.

The changes, which were discussed at an OSAA Executive Board meeting on Jan. 18, involve modifications to swimming and wrestling schedules, as well as potential updates to state basketball tournaments if affected by COVID-19. OSAA's press release noted that the modifications are subject to change as the pandemic continues to impact the landscape of high school sports in Oregon.

"The OSAA Executive Board remains committed to providing state championships in every activity offered by the Association and will continue to work closely with schools and venues throughout the year," the statement read.

The 2022 swimming state championships are set to be moved to a timed final format. Competition among 4A/3A/2A/1A teams will take place on the afternoon of Feb. 19, while the 5A state championship will occur on Feb. 18. The 6A state championship was moved to the morning of Feb. 19. Both the La Grande and Cove swim programs will compete on the afternoon of Feb. 19.

OSAA reported that the number of alternates allowed to attend per relay team was reduced from four to two athletes. The modification, along with schedule changes, will allow OSAA to access the Tualatin Hills Swim Center without reducing the number of qualifiers from across the state.

Adjustments that will not have a major impact on Union and Wallowa County schools were announced regarding wrestling and dance/drill state championships. The 6A state wrestling championship date was moved, and time requirements for dance/drill performances were adjusted.

OSAA stated that it plans to move forward with the eight-team format for the final sites of basketball state championships, but is prepared to move to home sites if necessary. The same adjustment was made during the volleyball playoffs in the fall.

The organization emphasized its playoff forfeiture policy — once the state brackets are published, COVID-19 related cancellations will be scored as a forfeit. It also went on to state that canceled league games should be rescheduled by Feb. 11.

ON THE SLATE

Tuesday, Jan. 25

COLLEGE MEN'S BASKETBALL
The College of Idaho at Eastern Oregon, 7:30 p.m.

COLLEGE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

The College of Idaho at Eastern Oregon, 5:30 p.m.

PREP BOYS BASKETBALL

Enterprise at Heppner, 7 p.m.
Pendleton at La Grande, 7:30 p.m.
Grant Union at Union, 7:30 p.m.

PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL

Enterprise at Heppner, 5:30 p.m.
Pendleton at La Grande, 6 p.m.
Grant Union at Union, 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 26

PREP GIRLS WRESTLING

McLoughlin, Nyssa at La Grande Dual, 5 p.m.

PREP BOYS BASKETBALL

Imbler at Pine Eagle, 5:30 p.m.
Pilot Rock at Enterprise, 6:30 p.m.

PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL

Imbler at Pine Eagle, 4 p.m.
Pilot Rock at Enterprise, 5 p.m.

Thursday, Jan. 27

COLLEGE BASEBALL

Eastern vs. MidAmerica Nazarene, Glendale, Arizona, 9 a.m.

PREP BOYS BASKETBALL

Powder Valley at Griswold, 7:30 p.m.

PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL

Powder Valley at Griswold, 6 p.m.

Perry makes move to win ECX

Montana musher claims 200-mile race as one of three winners

By **RONALD BOND**
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — Clayton Perry was in fourth place and well behind the race leaders coming into the final checkpoint of the Eagle Cap Extreme Sled Dog Race.

One of his fellow racers in the 200-mile race, Bino Fowler, asked him a question before he took off.

"He came over and asked if I was making a move," Perry said of Fowler.

The move to have his dogs pick up the pace and really test them paid off, and Perry crossed the finish line at 2:38 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 22, as the winner of the Eagle Cap Extreme in its return from a one-year hiatus.

"(I) took a high risk that they might not finish at all or get it done," Perry, the 2017 100-mile winner, said.

Perry was down nearly half of his team, as he started the race Jan. 20 with 12 dogs. He finished with seven, losing five along the way to soreness.

But he trusted in the rigorous training he and his partner, Morgan Anderson, had put in. They had done several lengthy runs and, Perry said, put in more than 1,200 miles in recent months. He knew his team was capable.

"(I) had a lot of confidence," he said. "This year's training with Morgan Anderson gave us a lot of confidence. We knew they could do it."

Perry has been close in recent years, taking fourth in each of the last two Eagle Cap Extreme races. He called the win "totally unexpected."

"Because there's a lot of competition. It's not easy to get done. I'm older. Most of the other competitors are half my age," the 62-year-old Perry said.

He had older dogs than many in the field, as well. Yet that experience — for both him and his team — was also a benefit. Perry is a veteran of the ECX who not only has run the 200-mile race the last few years, but had done the 100-mile race several times prior, including his win five years ago.

"Experience, knowing what to expect," he said. "Being here before (is) a definite advantage. Older dogs. More experienced dogs."

He outlasted a field that included his training partner, Anderson, Fowler, Rex Mumford and Bryce Mumford, and Jed Stephensen. Perry turned in a time of 38 hours, 31 minutes. The Mumfords both crossed about an hour later with matching times of 39:46, with Rex in second and Bryce in third, according to the official results. Stephensen placed fourth in 41:55, and Anderson took fifth with a time of 45:31. Fowler scratched during the



Ellen Morris Bishop/Contributed Photo

Montana musher Clayton Perry hugs his dogs after winning the Eagle Cap Extreme's 200-mile race early Saturday morning, Jan. 22, 2022, in Wallowa County. Perry posted a time 38 hours, 31 minutes.

final stretch.

It's the start of what Perry hopes will be a good 2022, with the goal in sight of trying to win the Rocky Mountain Triple Crown. The next race, the Idaho Sled Dog Challenge, begins Jan. 30, and following that is Montana's Race to the Sky in Perry's home state.

Lombardi wins 100-mile race in ECX debut

Also claiming the first leg of the triple crown was Nicole Lombardi, another Montana-based racer who was the victor of the 100-mile race in her first time at the ECX.

"I was a little nervous, but felt fully supported by the community, the race committee, veterinarians and fellow mushers," Lombardi said.

She ran away from the four-team field, completing the 100-mile course in 18 hours, 7 minutes. Steve Madsen took second in 22:33, and Jane Devlin crossed in 22:47. The fourth racer, Kevin Daugherty, scratched during the race.

Lombardi admitted she almost dropped from the race, worried the weather conditions would not bode well for her team.

"I almost didn't go. I was afraid of giving my dogs pneumonia," she said. "Turned out to be a really nice trail for the dogs."

It was a race of firsts for Lombardi — not only was it her first win at the ECX in her first try, but it was "really the first time I've raced 100 miles, and the first time racing my own dogs," she said.

It's also her first year back in racing after close to a decade off building her own team.

"Basically I needed to build my own kennel, and it took me 11 years to get to a place where I could balance work, breed dogs and get to the place where

we could do something like this," she said.

She intended to do it a year ago, but the pandemic altered those plans.

"We actually wanted to do it last year but everything was canceled due to COVID," she said.

Lombardi will be gearing up for the Idaho Sled Dog Challenge next week. She definitely plans to return to Joseph to race in the ECX, and said that while her career hinders it now, she would consider building up to the 200-mile race in the future.

"I would love to someday," she said.

First-time ECX musher Reimer takes 31-mile race

Another first-timer took the 31-mile, two-day race — California racer Jesika Reimer.

"The plan was just to get my yearlings some experience. All my adults have raced before," Reimer said. "They just plowed up those hills and loved the downhill."

Reimer, who owns 12 dogs, had four of the younger dogs on her team. She said she ran two of the yearlings during her first day, then switched to the others on the second day.

"Because I hadn't run the course before and it's the upper limit in mileage in what we trained this year, the Day 1 (plan) was to ride the brake, hold them back, run a conservative day," she said.

She let up on the reins the second day out.

"Day 2 heading out, I knew they still had a lot of gas in the tank. I have a little leader named Arrow, this little 38-pound black dog. I let her pick the pace on Day 2," Reimer said. "They really loved it. They hit the last 5 miles and they started sprinting. It was a really fun

ride into the finish line for sure."

Reimer finished in 6 hours, 22 minutes, just over an hour ahead of local racer Craig Anderson, who took second in 7:35. Chantelle Chase was third in 11:15, edging Kathy Miyoshi by 8 minutes. Candace Sarkesian scratched just a couple hours after the start.

Reimer said she was impressed at the performance of her team.

"For me, my dogs surprise me and amaze me all the time," she said. "I was amazed they were able to run those distances. They still had a ton of energy and were really happy. It was cool for me to see them have a good time and that they weren't pushed too hard."

Reimer said she'll run a couple more races this year, then plans to train her team up for the 100-mile race in 2023.

"It was such a welcoming community and such a beautiful place to run our dogs," she said. "We're looking forward to coming back again."

The lone racer in the 22-mile junior race, Sofie Kaaen of Baker City, completed the first day of the race, but scratched out of the second leg.

Randy Greenshields, the race president, said the field was smaller than in recent years, as several racers withdrew before the start.

"There was some sickness. We had a couple that were not COVID, but they were sick and didn't want to expose people," Greenshields said. "Others didn't get the training miles in this year."

Still, he said it was "another good year" for the race, and spoke highly of the ideal conditions for the mushers.

"The snow conditions were the best I think I've ever seen," he said. "The mushers really enjoyed the trails."

Big wins earn EOU women's basketball team recognition

The Observer

CORVALLIS — The Cascade Collegiate Conference announced Sunday, Jan. 23, the Eastern Oregon University women's basketball team was named the Under Armour Team of the Week for Jan. 17-23.

The Mountaineers moved into sole possession of first place with hard-fought wins over Oregon Institute of Technology and Southern Oregon University, according to a press release from the CCC.

Fans on Jan. 21 were treated to an extra frame of action as EOU needed an overtime period to take down the OIT Owls 79-75.

Taylor Stricklin led the way with 21 points and six

rebounds. Sailor Liefke added 20 points, six boards and four assists. Defensively, the Mountaineers held Oregon Tech to 36.8% from the field and 22% from beyond the arc.

Against SOU, Liefke exploded for 32 points to lead all scorers.

Trailing for a large portion of the game against Southern Oregon, the Mountaineers used a 19-point fourth quarter to propel them to the 68-65 come-from-behind victory. The win avenged an early season loss to the Raiders in Ashland.

Eastern, 14-7 overall and 11-2 in the CCC, next sees action Jan. 24 hosting the College of Idaho before welcoming Bushnell and Corban to Quinn Coliseum Jan. 28-29.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Taylor Stricklin makes a layup at Quinn Coliseum at Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, on Friday, Jan. 21, 2022. The EOU women's basketball team beat visiting Oregon Institute of Technology 79-75. EOU now is in first place and was the Cascade Collegiate Conference's Under Armour Team of the Week for Jan. 17-23.