

## Beavers generate more early buzz

Oregon State moves into top 20 in two more polls

By JOE FREEMAN  
The Oregonian

CORVALLIS — The Oregon State baseball team is batting .667 this preseason.

The Beavers collected two more national rankings last week, moving them into the top 25 in four of the six major college baseball polls, as the team inches toward a season-opening matchup in the Sanderson Ford College Baseball Classic.

The National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association slotted the Beavers at No. 18 in its preseason poll, while the USA Today Top 25, voted on by college baseball coaches, debuted the Beavers at No. 20. OSU already had been tabbed No. 11 by Baseball America and No. 18 by D1Baseball.com.

The rankings reinforce the lofty preseason expectations of the team, which were summed up by slugger Jacob Melton late last month: “I think anything short of Omaha is a failure for us,” he said, referring to the site of the College Baseball World Series.

The Beavers return perhaps the best starting pitching in the Pac-12 Conference, anchored by pre-season All-American left-hander Cooper Hjerpe, and a strong top-to-bottom lineup featuring Melton, Garret Forrester and Wade Meckler, among others. What’s more, the Beavers have been effusive in their praise for Australian freshman Travis Bazzana, who earned MVP honors in the West Coast League last summer and appears to be a budding star.

Oregon State opens the season Feb. 18 against New Mexico in Surprise, Arizona.



Melton



Hjerpe



Canham



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

La Grande’s Brody MacMillan (11) fends off a Burns defender Friday, Oct. 1, 2021, at Community Stadium in La Grande. Athletic directors from La Grande, Baker and Pendleton recently expressed concerns about a potential three-team league and have proposed a new Greater Oregon League lineup that would include Crook County, Madras and The Dalles.

## New-look league?

Latest OSAA proposal adds three schools to Greater Oregon League

By DAVIS CARBAUGH  
The Observer

WILSONVILLE — Local football coaches and athletic directors are advocating for a larger football league in Eastern Oregon.

Based on the Oregon School Activities Association’s latest football update, three local school will likely have their wishes granted.

At the most recent OSAA Football Ad Hoc Committee meeting in Wilsonville on Wednesday, Feb. 2, athletic directors from La Grande, Baker and Pendleton spoke by video to express their concerns about a potential three-team league. In the committee’s update on Feb. 4, the newly proposed Greater Oregon League would include Crook County, Madras and The Dalles.

“What we’re looking for is something just more equitable and something that’s more sustainable, at least for the next couple years, instead of having a three-team league,” Pendleton Athletic Director Mike Somnis said at the meeting.

Pendleton recently moved down from the 5A ranks to join Baker and La Grande at the 4A level, but former GOL team Ontario is also set to move down. McLoughlin and Ontario will both be 3A schools when the districts are reshuffled in 2022. The 3A Eastern Oregon League is set to consist of Burns, McLoughlin, Nyssa/Harper Charter, Ontario and Vale.

Between the 2016 and 2019 seasons, GOL teams played home-and-away series — this was emphasized in the OSAA meeting as an area of concern that a larger league could fix. Coming off a shortened 2020 season, La Grande and other GOL schools played five nonleague matchups and two league matchups to conclude the season.

La Grande Athletic Director



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Pendleton’s Owen Golter (23) and Grant Clark (29) cheer as the Buckaroos score during a 7-6 loss to the Dallas Dragons Friday, Nov. 5, 2021, in the first round of the OSAA 5A State Football Championships at the Pendleton Round-Up Arena in Pendleton.

Darren Goodman noted that the Tigers have only had two league matchups each of the last two seasons.

“Our kids deserve a decent league and the only reason we’re not getting it is because of where our school is,” he told the committee.

Goodman, along with the two other athletic directors, voiced the shared opinion that GOL schools are willing to travel in order to compete in a larger league.

The trip from La Grande to Crook County is an estimated 4-1/2 hours without traffic, while Madras is roughly a four-hour drive.

OSAA’s update also detailed that three teams from the Greater Oregon League will qualify for the 16-team playoffs. The newly-proposed district for the 2022 season reflect a similar plan proposed by Baker Athletic Director Buell Gonzales, who proposed an eight-team league to the committee. The Dalles and Crook County would drop down from 5A, while Madras was formerly a member of the Tri-Valley Conference.

According to Gonzales, the league could be created in a way that limits the amount of times outside schools would have to travel to Eastern Oregon.

“We can be creative in our scheduling and make it so one school does not have to travel to all three in the same season,”

Gonzales said.

All three athletic directors emphasized that the added travel would be worth the benefits of beefing up the league.

“In the fall, it’s never been an issue with weather,” Goodman informed the committee. “We haven’t had a team ever in the fall not be able to get to us or us getting to another school. That isn’t a valid reason to not give us two or three more teams. We’re willing to travel.”

Baker head football coach Jason Ramos echoed a similar sentiment, noting that the prospect of proposed trips to Central Oregon is not a factor.

“I’m in favor of the expansion proposal,” Ramos said. “A three-team league doesn’t do us any good. The OSAA has to do something to help us out, and I think this is a reasonable solution to that issue.”

With the four-team GOL roster that’s been in place for more than a decade, Baker has had to travel farther than that, including to Western Washington in past seasons, to fill its schedule, Ramos said.

With the newly proposed leagues, the Greater Oregon League would be one of four leagues with six teams — the 4A-5 Big Sky Conference would have seven teams. The OSAA Football Ad Hoc Committee is set to meet again in Wilsonville at 9 a.m. on Feb. 16.

## McCollum traded to New Orleans

Pelicans acquire Blazers guard in 7-player swap

By BRETT MARTEL  
The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — The New Orleans Pelicans acquired guard CJ McCollum from the Portland Trail Blazers as part of a seven-player trade on Tuesday, Feb. 8, that comes as the Pelicans make a push to qualify for the NBA postseason.

“It’s going to elevate our group,” Pelicans first-year coach Willie Green said. “CJ has seen it all. He’s been in the league for a decade, (he’s) been to a conference championship. He’s won at extremely high levels. He’s a pro, and we need guys like him to elevate on the court. So we’re excited. I’m excited. He’s excited.”

The Pelicans also received forwards Larry Nance Jr. and Tony Snell in the deal, while the Trail Blazers get forward Josh Hart, and guards Tomas Satoransky, Nickeil Alexander-Walker and Didi Louzada, as well as draft compensation in the form of a 2022 protected first-round draft choice and two future second-rounders.

The trade marks the end of an era in Portland, where McCollum has been paired with Damian Lillard in the backcourt since 2013. Portland has reached the playoffs every season since they drafted McCollum. However, the Blazers struggled in the postseason, reaching the Western Conference finals only once while being eliminated in the first round five times.

The 30-year-old McCollum is averaging 20.5 points, 4.5 assists and 4.3 rebounds this season.

He gives the Pelicans a needed outside shooting threat and overall reliable scorer at a time when New Orleans appears to be on the upswing — despite playing this season without star forward Zion Williamson. After starting 1-12, the Pelicans (22-32) have climbed into the final play-in spot in the Western Conference with the help of their current four-game winning streak.

Williamson, incidentally, has been in Oregon trying to rehabilitate from offseason surgery to repair his fractured right foot. It is unclear if he will be ready to return this season.

The Pelicans are making less than 33% from 3-point range this season and they are 29th in the league in 3-pointers made. McCollum has shot no less than 37.5%

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## SPORTS SHORT

## Davis named Cascade Collegiate Conference athlete of the week

By DAVIS CARBAUGH  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Coming off an excellent showing against Division I talent this past weekend, Eastern Oregon University’s TJ Davis was named Cascade Collegiate Conference indoor field athlete of the week.

The Sandpoint, Idaho, native placed second in the men’s heptathlon at the Washington State University Invitational on Friday, Feb. 4. Davis scored 5,248 points in the event, finishing just 34 points back of first place — he com-

peted against 11 other athletes in the event.

Davis was near the top of the field in just about every event, taking first place in shot put, high jump and the 1000-meter run. The junior took second in the 60-meter dash, third in the long jump and second in the 60-meter hurdles. Davis finished sixth in the pole vault.

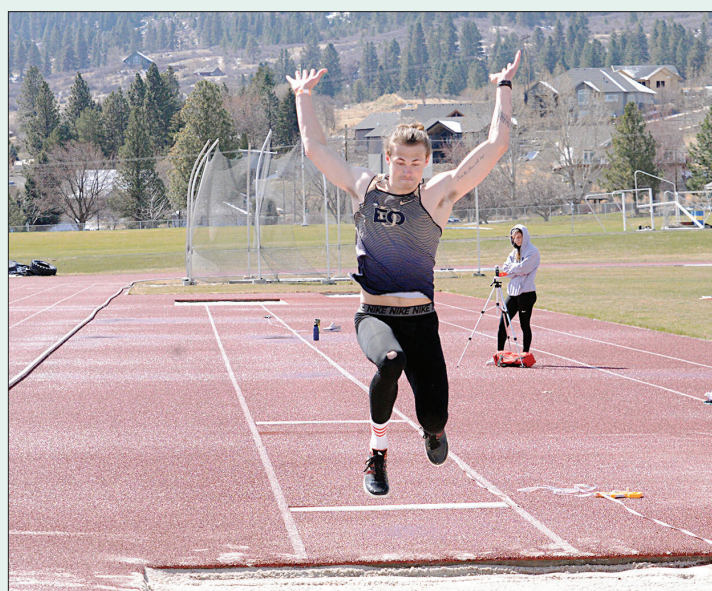
The strong showing by Davis ranks him first in the NAIA in the men’s heptathlon by just under 100 points. His score was also ranked as the second highest mark in Eastern’s

program history.

Davis beat out five Division I athletes. Eastern teammate Sam Roddewig placed sixth in the event.

The Mountaineers have one final regular season meet remaining in the indoor season before heading to the NAIA Indoor Championships. The competition is set to take place in Brookings, South Dakota from March 3 through March 5.

Eastern will travel to Spokane, Washington, on Feb. 12 to compete at the Whitworth Invitational. Events are slated to begin at 8 a.m.



Eastern Oregon University Athletics/Contributed Photo

Eastern Oregon University’s TJ Davis competes in the long jump at the Eastern Oregon Multi-Events meet on Wednesday, March 3, 2021, at Banner Bank Track in La Grande. Coming off a strong showing in the heptathlon at the Washington State University Invitational on Feb. 3, Davis was named Cascade Collegiate Conference field athlete of the week.