

ON THE SLATE

**Tuesday, Feb. 22**  
**COLLEGE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL**  
 Eastern Oregon vs. TBA, Cascade Collegiate Conference Tournament, Quinn Coliseum, 7 p.m.

**Wednesday, Feb. 23**  
**COLLEGE MEN'S BASKETBALL**  
 Eastern Oregon at TBA, Cascade Collegiate Conference Tournament, 7 p.m.

**Thursday, Feb. 24**  
**COLLEGE SOFTBALL**  
 Eastern Oregon at Menlo College, 10 a.m.  
 Eastern Oregon at Menlo College, noon

**PREP GIRLS WRESTLING**  
 La Grande at OSAA/OnPoint Girls State Championships, Culver High School, TBA

**Friday, Feb. 25**  
**COLLEGE SOFTBALL**  
 Eastern Oregon at William Jessup, noon  
 Eastern Oregon vs. Hope International, Rocklin, California 4 p.m.

**Saturday, Feb. 26**  
**COLLEGE BASEBALL**  
 Eastern Oregon at Lewis-Clark State, noon  
 Eastern Oregon at Lewis-Clark State, 3 p.m.

**COLLEGE WOMEN'S LACROSSE**  
 Eastern Oregon at Whitman, 10 a.m.

**PREP BOYS WRESTLING**  
 Union, Elgin, Imbler, Joseph, Wallowa, Enterprise at OSAA 1A/2A State Championships, Culver High School, TBA  
 La Grande at OSAA 4A State Championships, Cascade High School, TBA

**COLLEGE SOFTBALL**  
 Eastern Oregon vs. Hope International, Rocklin, California, 10 a.m.  
 Eastern Oregon at William Jessup, noon

**PREP WRESTLING**  
 Union, Elgin, Imbler at 1A State Championships, TBA  
 La Grande at 4A State Championships, TBA

**Sunday, Feb. 27**  
**COLLEGE WOMEN'S WRESTLING**  
 Eastern Oregon at Cascade Collegiate Conference Championships, Great Falls, Montana, TBA

**COLLEGE BASEBALL**  
 Eastern Oregon at Lewis-Clark State, 11 a.m.  
 Eastern Oregon at Lewis-Clark State, 2 p.m.

**COLLEGE SOFTBALL**  
 Eastern Oregon vs. Marymount California, Rocklin, California, 10 a.m.  
 Eastern Oregon vs. Marymount California, Rocklin, California, noon

**COLLEGE WOMEN'S LACROSSE**  
 Eastern Oregon vs. Whitworth, Walla Walla, 1 p.m.



Eastern Oregon's Xavier Lovelace (3) drives to the basket during the second half of a home game against Montana Western on Saturday, Oct. 30, 2021, at Quinn Coliseum, La Grande.

# Postseason push

Eastern Oregon basketball teams head to conference championships with high hopes

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**  
 The Observer

LA GRANDE — As winter's end gradually approaches, basketball season is reaching its culmination.

The Eastern Oregon University men's basketball team has overcome a series of obstacles under first-year interim head coach Chris Kemp, while the women's team sparked a major run in the second half of the season to finish near the top of the Cascade Collegiate Conference.

"I think our guys are playing the best basketball they've played all year," Kemp said. "I have high hopes that we're peaking at the right time."

### Overcoming adversity

The Eastern men's season has been far from predictable.

Just four games into the year, the program's all-time leading scorer, Max McCullough, suffered a season-ending injury. Experienced guard Paul Pennington was injured early on as well, missing the first half of the year. The injuries were a recipe for disaster for a first-year coach, but the Mountaineers buckled down and found a way to succeed.

Transfers Phillip Malatare and Xavier Lovelace have stepped up in a big way, helping the Mountaineers clinch a spot in the 2022 conference tournament.

Eastern will enter the tournament as the No. 6 seed in the conference and face Lewis-Clark State on the road in the opening round. The Mountaineers



EOU freshman Adyson Harris (25) breaks away at Quinn Coliseum, La Grande, during the Mountaineers' 79-75 win over Oregon Institute of Technology on Friday, Jan. 21, 2022.

lost to the Warriors 76-72 on Dec. 17 and 65-55 on Feb. 5. Eastern wrapped up the regular season with a 12-10 conference record.

Kemp noted that Malatare and Lovelace have been the team's two most solid contributors this season, as expected when the program signed the transfers. Malatare is averaging 19 points and 5.7 rebounds per game, while Lovelace is putting up 13.2 points and 8.3 rebounds per contest.

Kemp expressed that the team's success and mentality have been spawned from much more than the team's top scorers. Rotation players including Preston Chandler, Pennington, Justin Jeske, Cooper Lumsden, Zane Wright and Ismael Valdez also have contributed to the team's success.

"A lot of those returners have stepped into newer roles

and really blossomed," he said. "That whole returning group has been a huge plus for us, just how they've played together and gelled as a group."

In the wake of early-season injuries and the COVID-19 pandemic playing a big role in player availability, the Mountaineers managed to secure a winning record. As the post-season approaches rapidly, the team is as healthy as it can be and has its eyes set on a playoff push.

"I think that we grew a lot in our mental toughness," Kemp said. "There have been some huge hurdles, but we've learned a ton and I think we'll be able to draw on that as we move forward."

Tip-off against Lewis-Clark State is set for 7 p.m. in Lewiston, Idaho on Feb. 23.

"The guys have a mentality of just being road dogs, which is

what we call it," Kemp said. "We have to go be the same team on the road as we are here."

### Women's team among conference elites

The Mountaineers women's team did not get off to an ideal start, but conference play presented Eastern with a chance to rise to the top.

The team began the year 2-5, but rallied to a 21-9 record at the conclusion of the regular season. Eastern has remained among the top three in the Cascade Collegiate Conference, alongside Lewis-Clark State and Southern Oregon.

Eastern finished the season as the No. 3 seed heading into the Cascade Collegiate Tournament. The Mountaineers have clinched home-court advantage in the quarterfinal round and will face Warner Pacific at Quinn Coliseum on Feb. 22. Tip-off is slated for 7 p.m.

For some teams, home and away makes little difference. For Eastern, Quinn Coliseum has been a nightmare for opposing women's basketball teams coming in to play the Mountaineers. Eastern compiled a 10-1 record at home this year, while going 7-4 on the road.

The Mountaineers have relied on a three-pronged scoring attack this year. Junior Sailor Liefke has led Eastern with 15.4 points and 3.3 assists per game, while senior Taylor Stricklin is averaging 13.4 points and 8.4 rebounds per game. Freshman Adyson Harris has been a pleasant addition to Eastern's rotation, averaging 12 points and 4.5 rebounds per contest.

SPORTS SHORT

## Sanctioned Oregon wrestling dual meet championship nixed by OSAA committee

By **NIK STRENG**  
 The Oregonian

PORTLAND — The Oregon School Activities Association's State Championship Committee has made it clear in recent months that it would like to make as few changes as possible as it puts together a plan for the 2022-2026 time block.

Part of that plan includes shutting down a proposal for a wrestling dual meet state championship.

Culver wrestling coach J.D. Alley pitched the idea of a dual meet state championship to the committee during a Jan. 24 meeting.



La Grande's Joshua Collins, left, and Pendleton's Gabe Browning at Pendleton High School. Collins won by fall.

"I want to propose incorporating, in our season, an OSAA sanctioned dual meet tournament," Alley told the

committee on Jan. 24. "I think I can do this in one week with two dates and involving eight teams with

some home duals."

Alley said the tournament could be a part of the regular season and would be held in early February, after the Reser's Tournament of Champions and before district tournaments. The committee did say that any classification would be capable of running an unofficial pilot version of the dual meet state championship and the committee would use that to see if it is viable statewide.

The State Championship Committee is also looking into changing the bracket size for the state championships, but that will be a topic of discussion for the upcoming

March 14 meeting.

The committee added that it wants to condense the number of state championship sites in the future, but is leaving the door open for the state tournament to be held at multiple locations if it chooses to increase the bracket sizes for any classification.

For the 2021-2022 season, the state championships are being held at multiple locations (6A at Sandy High School, 5A at Ridgeview, 4A at Cascade, 3A at La Pine, and 2A/1A and the girls tournament at Culver).

"Going from a single site at the Veterans Memo-

rial Coliseum to six separate venues is not sustainable moving into the future," reads the OSAA's update on the meeting.

Outside of wrestling, the committee announced that it does not support the creation of a 10th race at the cross country state championship meet, as coaches have asked the OSAA to split up the 3A/2A/1A girls race. Currently, the three classification race together due to lower participation among the smaller schools.

Boys cross country does have it split up so there is a separate 3A race and a 2A/1A race.