

BASKETBALL

Local standouts earn all-district honors

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — At the conclusion of the Old Oregon League district championship games, a slew of Union and Wallowa County basketball players were named to the all-district teams.

Powder Valley's Reece Dixon headlined the selections, earning player of the year on the boys side.

Union County and Wallowa County swept the coach of the year awards. Imbler's Tony Haddock was named boys coach of the year after leading the Panthers to a 7-5 record. Imbler's roster consisted of three upperclassmen and nine sophomores. On the girls side, Wallowa's Greg Oveson led a young roster to a 8-3 record in league play and 16-8 overall.

On the boys side, Union County athletes Patrick Frisch of Cove and Kaden Krieger of Powder Valley were named to the first team. Joseph's Blade Suto also earned first-team honors.

Imbler's Rachael Stirewalt and Powder Valley's Dallee

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OLD OREGON LEAGUE ALL-DISTRICT BOYS TEAMS

Coach of the year: Tony Haddock, Imbler
Player of the year: Reece Dixon, Powder Valley

First team:
Patrick Frisch, Cove
Cole Morgan, Pine Eagle
Blade Suto, Joseph
Kaden Krieger, Powder Valley
Aaron Barkley, Nixyaawii
Baron Moses, Nixyaawii

Second team:
Caleb Brown, Pine Eagle
Chase Homan, Joseph
Cole Martin, Powder Valley
Justin Frost, Imbler
Dylan Abrahamson, Nixyaawii
Honorable mention:
Willie Gibbs, Wallowa
Jake Bingaman, Imbler
Caleb Wiggins, Cove
Wyatt Burgess, Cove
James Burney, Joseph
Hayden Hite, Joseph
Coyote Jackson, Nixyaawii
Case Olson, Powder Valley
Kaiden Dalke, Powder Valley

OLD OREGON LEAGUE ALL-DISTRICT GIRLS TEAMS

Coach of the year: Greg Oveson, Wallowa
Player of the year: Sophie Bronson, Nixyaawii

First team:
Rachael Stirewalt, Imbler
Zoe Hermens, Wallowa
Mersayus Hart, Nixyaawii
Dallee Bingham, Powder Valley
Second team:
Sophie Moeller, Wallowa
Aimee Meyers, Joseph
Jaycee Gray, Powder Valley
Kyella Picard, Nixyaawii
Gracie Evans, Elgin

Honorable mention:
Laurel Marler, Cove
Jodi Bingham, Powder Valley
Libby Fisher, Wallowa
Taylor Cochell, Pine Eagle
Sistine Moses, Nixyaawii
Cooper Nave, Joseph
Sydney Moore, Griswold
Joelle Treat, Imbler



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin
Cove's Tim Koza competes in the 200-yard individual medley race during the 4A/3A/2A/1A state championships in Beaverton on Saturday, Feb. 19, 2022.

HISTORIC SWIM

By DAVIS CARBAUGH • The Observer

COVE — The Cove swimming team may have a small roster, but its impact in the swim community this year was large.

Senior Tim Koza's two individual state titles marked the first time a Cove swimmer won a state championship. The Leopards came away with six top-three finishes at the 4A/3A/2A/1A state championship, despite sending just four swimmers to the statewide event.

"I really felt like everybody did what they could," Cove head coach Steve Koza said. "I didn't feel like we left anything behind. Everybody came out and did their best."

History in Cove

When Tim Koza clocked in at 1:56.64 to take first overall in the boys 200-yard IM, the senior swimmer made history for Cove. He became the first ever state champion in the program's young history, improving on his seed time by nearly three seconds.

"In the moment I wasn't thinking about it," Tim Koza said. "To bring the school the first title in swimming is big, but I know there will be more to follow."

As if making history in one event was not enough, Tim Koza was back for more in the 100-yard breaststroke. The Leopards' swimmer battled out a first-place finish with a time of 1:00.18, defeating La Grande's Glenn Ricker, a junior, by just 0.55 seconds.

Despite being favored in each event, the experienced swimmer knew not to take anything for granted coming into the final meet of his high school career.

"In that top spot you have everything to lose, so you come in thinking that you need to do the best you can," Tim Koza said. "You don't look behind in swimming."

Alongside Tim Koza, senior Kaleo Theis rounded out his high school career on a very strong note. The transfer from Pendleton finished as runner-up in the 50-yard freestyle and third in the 100-yard freestyle.

Tim Koza's state titles cap successful Cove swimming season



Andy Dieckhoff/Pamplin Media Group

Cove's Tim Koza accepts his first-place medal for the 200-yard IM at the 4A Special District 2 swim meet in Madras on Saturday, Feb. 12, 2022. Koza went on to win the state title on Feb. 19, making history for Cove. He became the first ever state champion in the program's young history.

"I think Kaleo had two of his best swims all season, by far," coach Steve Koza said. "He was up against some really, really good competition."

For Theis and Tim Koza, the seniors leave the program after making a positive mark at Cove.

"For our little team, the accomplishments are really something," the coach said.

Building a program

For a young Leopards swimming program, the top finishes are a sign of things to come. As two essential swimmers on the boys side depart the program after graduation, sophomore Sarah Koza will look to anchor the girls team moving forward the next two years.

Sarah Koza finished as the runner-up in the girls 100-yard breaststroke with a time of 1:10.90. She was back on the podium in the girls 50-yard freestyle, placing third overall at 25.07.

"She's got a very bright future," Steve

Koza said. On the boys side, junior Taylor Fox placed eighth in both the 50-yard freestyle and 100-yard butterfly. The multi-sport standout will be an anchor on the boys side moving forward.

"We're small and we're mighty," Tim Koza said. "Even with a small team, we've had several people decide they're going to swim next year just because of what we were able to do."

The Cove swimmers are hoping to continue attracting new swimmers and building up the program. Prior to the state championships, the Leopards swimmers went in front of the school board to share their successes.

According to Steve Koza, the board plans to continue supporting the program in the coming years.

"I think it's pretty incredible. Coaches are always asking where Cove is. It's kind of unheard of to see that success," he said. "They know who we are now. We've got some power to our name now."

SPORTS SHORT

Malatare earns conference player of the week honors

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Eastern Oregon University men's basketball team ended the regular season on top, in terms of victories and individual achievements.

After leading the Mountaineers to a 2-0 road trip, point guard Phillip Malatare was named Cascade Collegiate Conference men's basketball player of the week on

Monday, Feb. 21.

Malatare recorded a double-double in the team's victories over Multnomah (80-77) and Warner Pacific (73-71) this past weekend. The junior averaged 25 points and 12 rebounds per contest, while dishing out six total assists. Malatare shot 52.8% from the field during the two-game winning streak.

This is Malatare's third time earning conference player of the

week honors this season after transferring into the program in the offseason.

Malatare played a big role in Eastern finishing off the regular season on a high note. The Mountaineers have won four straight games heading into the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament.

Throughout the regular season, Malatare posted 19 points, 5.7 rebounds and 3.4 assists per game.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

The Mountaineers' Phillip Malatare (0) drives to the basket in Eastern Oregon's 67-61 win over Montana Western at Quinn Coliseum on Saturday, Oct. 30, 2021. Malatare scored 15 points in the team's home opener.