



Andrew Cutler/The Observer, File

Eastern Oregon University senior Noel Orozco, left, an All-American at 285 pounds, wrestles for the Mountaineers. The men's wrestling team ranked No. 19 in the Jan. 27, 2022, NAIA Coaches' Top-20 Poll.

BASKETBALL

Liefke, Stricklin named first-team all conference

Team awaits word on possible at-large bid to NAIA tourney

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Two pillars of the Eastern Oregon University women's basketball team finished up the conference postseason with top honors.

Senior Taylor Stricklin and junior Sailor Liefke were both named first-team all Cascade Collegiate Conference in the conference's post-season awards announcement on Tuesday, March 1.



Stricklin

The duo have been anchors at Eastern this season, but the accomplishment is not a first-time occurrence. Both Stricklin and Liefke were first-team selections in Eastern's 2021 spring season.



Liefke

Liefke led Eastern in scoring this year, putting up 15.6 points per contest. She shot 41.7% from the field and 33.3% from three-point range off 180 attempts. The junior guard also led the way in assists with 100 on the season.

Stricklin was a steady scoring option for the Mountaineers, while also leading the team with 8.3 rebounds per game. The senior guard averaged 13.4 points per game and also dished out 64 assists.

Through conference postseason play, the Mountaineers finished with a 22-10 record overall and 18-4 in conference play.

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HIGH HOPES

EOU men's wrestling team looks to continue underdog postseason run

By DAVIS CARBAUGH • The Observer

WICHITA, Kan. — The Mountaineers are riding high off a stellar showing at the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament, but the team's end goal is still in sight.

The Eastern Oregon University men's wrestling program came in as underdogs, but shocked the conference by taking home the championship. The team is now gearing up to send six wrestlers to the NAIA National Championships in Wichita, Kansas on March 4.

"We have to step on the mat and perform, it's not just going to be given to us," head coach Dustyn Azure said. "They're a great group that understands that we have to compete hard. It's a dog fight."

The Mountaineers scored 130.5 points in the conference championships to take first overall, despite coming in ranked below several other opponents. Eastern saw one conference champion in Kyle Knudtson at 184, while five other wrestlers earned national qualifications for their performances.

According to Azure, the Mountaineers have faced their fair share of adversity this



Andrew Cutler/The Observer, File

Eastern Oregon University's Jay Smith faces off against Southern Oregon University's John White at Quinn Coliseum in La Grande on Saturday, Nov. 6, 2021. Smith earned Cascade Collegiate Conference player of the week honors on Monday, Jan. 11, 2022 after taking two dual victories and helping Eastern sweep Arizona Christian and Embry-Riddle on consecutive days.

season. From COVID-19 cancellations to injuries and illnesses, the conference championships marked the first time that Eastern had its full squad competing at one competition.

"It was a great accomplishment for these guys to get out there and wrestle to their ability," Azure said. "These guys have overcome a lot of adversity the last couple years and have done a great job of trying to get

better every day."

Now that Eastern is at full strength, the focus has shifted to finding success at the national level. The Mountaineers head into the tournament ranked No. 16 in the latest NAIA poll, with four wrestlers ranked individually.

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SPORTS SHORT

Sad, not shocked: MLB fans take gut-punch of canceled games

The Associated Press

JUPITER, Fla. — Major League Baseball has canceled opening day, with Commissioner Rob Manfred announcing Tuesday, March 1, the sport will scrap regular-season games over a labor dispute for the first time in 27 years after acrimonious lockout talks collapsed in the hours before management's deadline.

Manfred said he is canceling the first two series of the season that was set to begin March 31, dropping the schedule from 162 games to likely 156 games at most. Manfred said the league and union have not made plans for future negotiations. Players won't be paid for missed games.

"My deepest hope is we get an agree-

ment quickly," Manfred said. "I'm really disappointed we didn't make an agreement."

After the sides made progress during 13 negotiating sessions over 16-1/2 hours Feb. 28, the league sent the players' association a "best and final offer" March 1 on the ninth straight day of negotiations.

Players rejected that offer, setting the stage for MLB to follow through on its threat to cancel opening day.

"Rob Manfred and MLB's owners have canceled the start of the season," the union said in a statement. "Players and fans around the world who love baseball are disgusted, but sadly not surprised."

"Against the backdrop of growing revenues and record profits, we are

seeking nothing more than a fair agreement. What Rob Manfred characterized as a 'defensive lockout' is, in fact, the culmination of a decades-long attempt by owners to break our player fraternity. As in the past, this effort will fail."

At 5:10 p.m., Manfred issued a statement that many fans had been dreading: Nothing to look forward to on opening day, normally a spring standard of renewal for fans throughout the nation and some in Canada, too.

The ninth work stoppage in baseball history will be the fourth that causes regular season games to be canceled, leaving Fenway Park and Dodger Stadium as quiet in next month as Joker Marchant Stadium and Camelback Park have been during the third straight disrupted spring training.



Wilfredo Lee/The Associated Press

Baseball fans watch as Major League Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred speaks during a news conference after negotiations with the players' association toward a labor deal, Tuesday, March 1, 2022, at Roger Dean Stadium in Jupiter, Fla. Manfred said he is canceling the first two series of the season that was set to begin March 31, dropping the schedule from 162 games to likely 156 games at most. Manfred said the league and union have not made plans for future negotiations. Players won't be paid for missed games.

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