

A long road back

Beavers QB Tristan Gebbia battles for the starting job

By NICK DASCHSEL
The Oregonian

CORVALLIS — Where it started for Oregon State quarterback Tristan Gebbia: Late in the fourth quarter on a crisp Nov. 27, 2020, evening in Reser Stadium, Gebbia attempts to give Oregon State the lead in its game against Oregon.

On third-and-goal from the Oregon 1, Gebbia takes the center snap and tries diving into the end zone. As he's making a last-ditch lunge, Oregon safety Verone McKinley III grabs Gebbia's leg.

The action not only prevents Gebbia from scoring, it causes two hamstring ligaments to tear from the bone. Days later, Gebbia's hamstring is surgically repaired, but he's told recovery is a 12-to-18-month process.

How it's going for Gebbia: It's some 16 months later, and Gebbia is fully engaged in OSU's spring practice, moving as he did prior to the injury.

The sixth-year senior, declaring he's 100 percent, has an eye on returning to the field this fall as the Beavers' starting quarterback.

It won't be easy. Gebbia not only has to beat out incumbent starter Chance Nolan, but perhaps J.T. Daniels, should the Georgia graduate transfer decide to play his final year at Oregon State.

Win or lose the job, Gebbia says he feels "blessed" to be in the competition. "There was a point in time where it was looking bleak for me to be back. I'm very happy that I'm out there," Gebbia said.

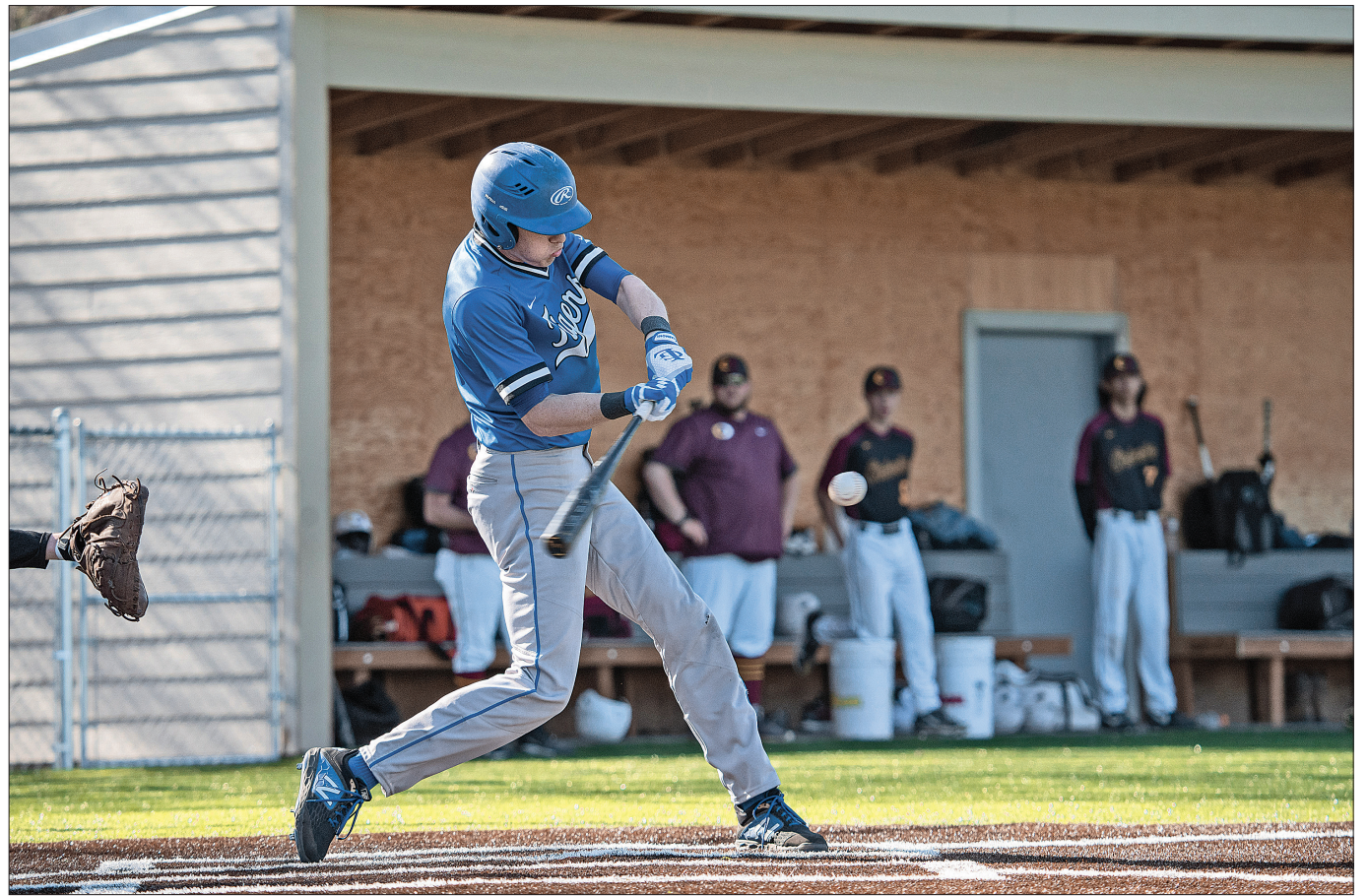
Prior to the injury, Gebbia spent the better part of two years earning the starting job. Transferring from Nebraska to OSU in 2018, Gebbia took a redshirt year, then played one season behind senior Jake Luton. In 2020, Gebbia was promoted to starter, and with each game, grew into the job.

The apex of Gebbia's season came against Oregon. Gebbia and the OSU offense had its way for the most part against the Ducks, piling up yards through the air and on the ground. Trailing 31-19 heading into the fourth quarter, Gebbia piloted the Beavers on two touchdown drives, and potentially a third with less than a minute remaining.

Oregon State eventually got into the end zone and won the game, but Gebbia could only watch the finishing touches from the sideline. As Gebbia came up short on that fateful third-and-goal play, he hopped to the sideline on one leg.

Months afterward, even a year later, Beaver fans seethed on social media about McKinley's attempted tackle of

See, Gebbia/Page A8



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

La Grande's Devin Bell (5) connects with a pitch at Optimist Field, La Grande, on Thursday, April 7, 2022. La Grande swept Ontario in a doubleheader, posting 14-1 and 19-1 wins in its first home games of the season.

FAST START

Tigers excel in nonconference slate behind all-around efforts of senior Devin Bell

By DAVIS CARBAUGH • The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Tigers are firing out of the gates this season.

The La Grande varsity baseball team started the season in strong form, rattling off wins and benefiting from key performances from players all across the diamond. Senior Devin Bell has anchored La Grande's hitting prowess during the fast start to the season, garnering statewide honors.

"I think that compared to the other teams we've played, our teamwork is like a brotherhood with each other and

that leads us to play amazing on the field," Bell said. "As soon as this baseball season started, we were all right into it. We just got straight into it like we never left."

The Tigers have cruised through the first third of the season, defeating most opponents in dominant fashion. La Grande is 10-1 on the year, riding a six-game winning streak into the bulk of league competition.

Facing a heavy slate of nonconference road games to start off the season, La Grande came out on top with an 8-1 record through the competition in Washington, Arizona and the west side of Oregon. Upon returning home for the first official games on the new turf at Pioneer Park, the Tigers stayed in top form with a convincing doubleheader

victory over Ontario to begin league play. La Grande won game one 14-1 and ran away with a 19-1 victory in the second matchup.

The Tigers have left little in question in most of their victories this year, scoring double digits in seven games and winning by nearly 10 runs on average — while holding opponents to an average of 2.3 runs per contest.

Leading the way at the plate so far has been Bell, who has been a nightmare to opposing pitchers. Through 11 games, Bell is averaging .542 at the plate with 18 runs and 32 RBIs. The senior noted that the players on the team have been playing together for years, making for a smooth transition from the

See, Tigers/Page A8

EOU mines another gem out of Heppner

Brock Hisler joins a long list of former Mustangs to become a Mountaineer

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

HEPPNER — Heppner High School has turned out several top-notch football players over the years, and Eastern Oregon University coach Tim Camp has tried to scoop up as many as he can.

Brock Hisler is the latest Heppner player to join the Mountaineers.

"I'm very excited," Hisler said. "We were emailing back and forth and they invited me up for a visit."

For Camp, getting Heppner youths in his program is a bonus.

"They are good kids and they work hard," Camp said. "Coach (Greg) Grant does such a great job. He gets them going in the right direction and they fit into our pro-

gram. I will take all the Heppner kids I can get. They have grit, determination and they want to be coached. Not every kid has that in this day and age."

Hisler met with defensive coordinator Bryan Mills, who let him know they thought the best fit for him would be a linebacker.

"I like him on the defensive side of the ball," Camp said. "He has good athletic position flexibility. I'm fully aware how he runs the ball, but I want to try him on defense first."

Grant said no matter the position Hisler plays, he will not disappoint at EOU.

"He is a kid who is going to give them 100%" Grant said. "He is very coachable, hardworking and someone you can count on.

He just wants to play football. He will do what you ask of him, and how you ask. That's what they will enjoy the most."

Mills gave Hisler a campus tour, then they met with Camp, who offered Hisler a partial scholarship to become a Mountaineer.

"He said he's been pleased with the Heppner kids he's had," said Hisler, who will pursue an agriculture business degree.

Other Heppner players to suit up for the Mountaineers include offensive lineman Patrick Collins, linebacker Chris Kindle, receiver Mason Lehman and linebacker Jackson Lehman.

Grant said Eastern is a good fit for Hisler.

"They don't look down at (small-school players)," Grant said.



Greg Grant/Contributed Photo

Heppner's Brock Hisler will play football at Eastern Oregon University in the fall of 2022. He was a 2A first-team all-state selection at linebacker and running back his senior year in Heppner.

"They give every kid the same opportunity. Education is the No. 1 thing, and football is a fun thing. It fits in pretty well with our core values."

Hisler also had been in contact with University of Puget Sound and Carroll College in Montana, which

See, Hisler/Page A8

Find up-to-date scores and additional game coverage for your local high school, available 24/7 at www.lagrandeobserver.com.