

Marketing deals loom in prep sports

Seven states have so far approved deals for high school athletes

By MARK GILLISPIE
The Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Ian Jackson and Johnuel “Boogie” Fland are among the brightest stars in the firmament of high school basketball and now have business deals to prove it.

The New York City teens and friendly rivals are cashing in on their name, image and likeness through marketing contracts often referred to as NIL deals. The contracts have begun to trickle down to the high school level after the NCAA’s decision last year to allow college athletes to monetize their stardom.

Seven states have so far approved the deals for prep athletes. Other states, such as Ohio, continue to debate whether NILs would sully high school sports.

Jackson and Fland, both ranked as top college prospects for the 2024 graduating class, are paid a percentage of sales on a merchandise company’s products carrying their likeness and four-figure monthly checks to post about the brand on social media.

Jackson, 16, said he is saving the money he earns from the merchandise company Spreadshop and several other deals to buy a home for his family.

“I want to put my family in a better place,” Jackson said.

Fland, 15, also said he wants to help his family.

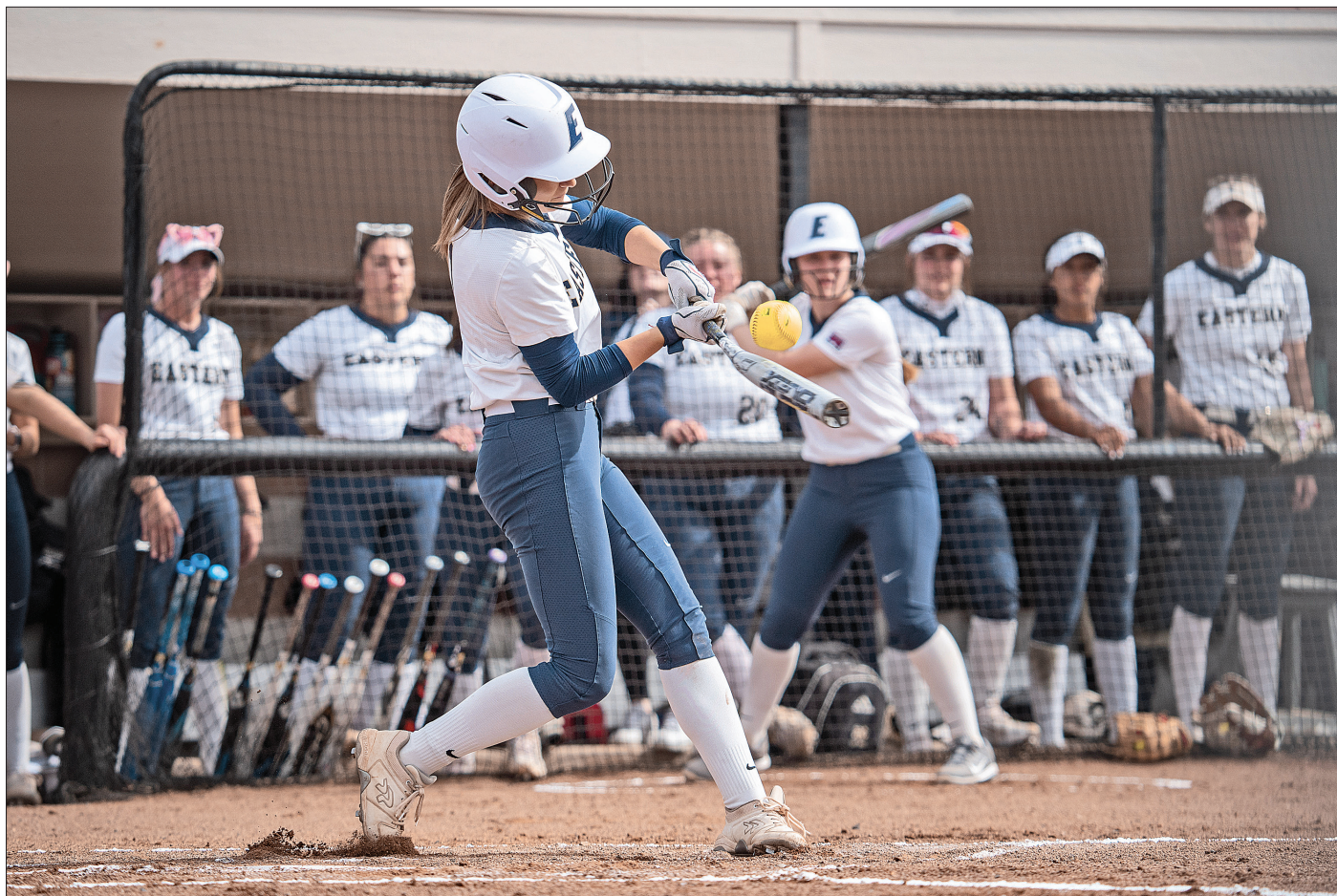
“It’s been a very big deal,” he said. “All the hard work is finally paying off.”

In Ohio, high school principals began voting May 1 on whether to change the state high school athletic association’s bylaws to allow athletes to sign deals.

“A lot of us here at the OHSAA and school administrators don’t like NIL,” said Ohio High School Athletic Association spokesperson Tim Stried. “We wish we weren’t having to deal with this, but it’s not going away. We can have a hand in shaping it or do what the NCAA did and fight it until otherwise.”

Karissa Niehoff, CEO of the National Federation of State High School Associations, said NIL rights

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Madison Stateler (1) bends the bat as she hits a pitch during the match between Eastern Oregon University and Providence University at Peggy Anderson Softball Field, La Grande on Friday, March 25, 2022.

Coming up short

Eastern Oregon softball team’s conference title run comes to end in semifinals

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

KLAMATH FALLS — After a valiant run at the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament title, the Eastern Oregon University softball program ultimately saw its hopes end just one round shy of the conference championship game.

The Mountaineers strung together a strong regular season to secure the third seed heading into the tournament, jostling for position at the top of the conference standings with several of the nation’s top-ranked teams. While Eastern’s conference run came up short and the team’s postseason fate now relies on a

potential at-large berth, the team’s quarterfinal victory tied a program record for wins in a season with 41.

Taking care of business in the opener

After battling out the closure of the regular season to secure the No. 3 seed in the Cascade Collegiate Conference, the Mountaineers faced a first-round matchup against six-seeded Corban. Eastern took care of business late in the game, running away with an 8-1 victory despite a close start.

After taking a 1-0 lead in the first inning, Eastern found itself tied 1-1 heading into the bottom of the fifth inning — at this point in the game, the Mountaineers took full control. Eastern scored two runs in the bottom of the fifth off RBI hits from Madison Stateler and Taylor Dow for a 3-1 lead.

Just one inning later, RBIs from Haley Ebner, Stateler, Hannah Tyree, Dow and Grace Gaither blew the game wide open. The Mountaineers extended an 8-1 lead, allowing for the team to close out the final half inning.

Amanda Smith earned her 18th win

of the season, pitching all seven innings and allowing one run off just two hits. The senior struck out nine opposing batters in the win, including two in the top of the seventh to secure Eastern’s spot in the next round.

Entering the tournament as the three seed, Eastern was tasked with playing its quarter final game just hours after defeating Corban — the Mountaineers matched up with rival No. 8 Southern Oregon, a team that Eastern went 1-3 against in the regular season.

The contest was a nail-biter, as Eastern once again relied on a late rally to take the victory. Southern Oregon got on the board first, taking a 1-0 lead in the top of the third off a throwing error.

In the bottom of the fifth inning, Stateler played the hero role with a three-run home run to left field that flipped the script. The deep shot scored Shelby Starr and Rhyanne Oates to give the Mountaineers a 3-1 lead.

Smith, pitching in her second game of the day, closed out the final two innings in commanding fashion. She allowed

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SPORTS SHORT

Bell named to 4A all-state team

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Coming off a strong season on the hardwood, La Grande senior Devin Bell earned a selection to the Oregon 4A state team.

Bell, who controlled the paint for the Tigers this past season, earned a nomination to the second team. The forward was the only player from a high school east of Bend to earn a spot on the team.

The all-state teams are determined by votes from coaches across the state at the 4A level.

Bell was a key piece of a La

Grande team that finished the season 16-5 overall and 5-1 in league play — the Tigers won the Greater Oregon League tournament and advanced to the 4A state playoffs. While La Grande battled out a neck-and-neck matchup against Banks in the first round, a last-second buzzer-beater ended the Tigers’ season.

The nomination for Bell caps off a winter sports season of high accolades, as he was also named Greater Oregon League player of the year. Bell was joined by Brady Hutchins, Sam Tsiatsos, Logan Williams and Jace Schow on the all-district teams.



The Observer, File

Devin Bell (5) gains some air for a shot attempt during a match between the La Grande and Nyssa boys basketball teams at La Grande High School on Wednesday, Dec. 8, 2021. The La Grande Tigers secured a convincing 61-43 victory over the visiting team.

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