



The Observer/File
Grace Gaither (15) receives a hero's welcome at home plate after hitting a home run during a game between Eastern Oregon University and Providence University at Peggy Anderson Softball Field, La Grande, on Friday, March 25, 2022.

One for the RECORD BOOKS

EOU softball comes up one game short of NAIA World Series berth, sets program record for single-season wins

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH** • The Observer

OKLAHOMA CITY — The Eastern Oregon University softball program wrapped up a historic season this week.

The Mountaineers were defeated 6-1 by Oklahoma City University in the opening-round championship game on Wednesday, May 18, but the season was far from a disappointment. Eastern set a program record for wins with 43, a season record that stood at 41 since 1999. Eastern finished the year with a 43-17 overall record, going 24-6 in conference play.

“At the end of the day, we’re super happy and super proud,” EOU head coach Nicole Christian said.

After falling to Texas A&M Texarkana in the opening-round quarterfinals, Eastern bounced back with two resounding victories on the second day against Williams Woods and a rematch against Texas A&M Texarkana. Eastern bounced William Woods 8-4 and then eliminated the Eagles in the rematch from the first day, 6-0.

The two wins set up the winner’s bracket matchup

with Oklahoma City in the opening-round championship, but ultimately the Mountaineers’ came up just short of a trip to the NAIA World Series, falling 6-1 to close the season.

The Stars of Oklahoma City, the No. 2 team in the NAIA rankings, took an early lead over the Mountaineers in the opening-round championship game and never looked back, relying on a big rally in the fifth inning to put the game out of reach.

In the fifth, Eastern gave up three runs off a single, passed ball and wild pitch — the Mountaineers trailed 4-0 at the end of the frame.

Just one inning later, Oklahoma City added another run as Mallory McCoy grounded out to third to allow Kaitlyn Jones to score and extend the lead to 5-0. As the game continued to progress in Oklahoma City’s favor, another run in the top of the seventh all but put the game out of reach as Eastern headed into the final half inning down 6-0.

“I felt like we competed against one of the best teams in the nation,” Christian said.

Eastern concluded the regular season with five

players earning spots to the Cascade Collegiate Conference teams. Amber Smith and Grace Gaither were named first team, while Caitlin Crist earned second team and Shelby Starr and Karysn Zaragoza were named honorable mention. The team finished third in the regular season conference standings, as well as in the conference tournament. Crist concluded the year with 27 stolen bases, which is a program record for steals in a season.

“We want to continue to build that tradition and I’m excited for it,” Christian said.

The Mountaineers exceeded expectations this season, competing side-by-side with several of the top softball programs in the country. Eastern defeated nine ranked opponents and managed to go 33-13 in games not played in La Grande. Christian concluding just her third year with the team, the Mountaineers will aim to continue building off the winningest season in program history in the years to come.

“We’re excited for the future, knowing that we’ll be refueling next year and building on this year,” Christian said.

ON DECK

May 18 results

COLLEGE SOFTBALL

Oklahoma City 6, Eastern Oregon 1

PREP BASEBALL

Grant Union/Prairie City 8, Union/Cove 3
Grant Union/Prairie City 16, Union/Cove 6

Friday, May 20

(Games completed after print deadline)

PREP BASEBALL

Pendleton/Griswold at La Grande, 4 p.m.

PREP SOFTBALL

La Grande at Pendleton/Griswold, 4:30 p.m.

PREP TRACK & FIELD

Cove, Elgin, Imbler, Powder Valley, Union at OSAA 1A State Championships, Eugene, TBA
Union at OSAA 2A State

Championships, Eugene, TBA
La Grande at OSAA 4A State Championships, Eugene, TBA

Wednesday, May 25

COLLEGE TRACK & FIELD
Eastern Oregon at NAIA Outdoor Championships, Gulf Shores,

Alabama, all day

Thursday, May 26

COLLEGE TRACK & FIELD
Eastern Oregon at NAIA Outdoor Championships, Gulf Shores, Alabama, all day

Athletes make one last push at season’s end



DAVIS CARBAUGH
CARBAUGH'S CORNER

LA GRANDE — It’s that time of year when local athletes begin traveling around the state for playoffs and championships.

After a long season of sports, the first for me as a reporter at The Observer, many local athletes are wrapping up a full year of accomplishments with play-

offs approaching in baseball, softball, track and tennis.

First and foremost this weekend are the track and field athletes, who are competing in Eugene during the time of Saturday’s print version.

Several 1A and 2A teams will have athletes in attendance, while La Grande sends a sizable group on both the boys and girls sides.

While most of the Tigers’ girls runners are underclassmen, many will likely place near the top in their respective events.

On the diamond, things have heated up as well for La Grande. The baseball team is riding an extensive winning streak into the postseason — a large group of upperclassmen look poised to make a run at a state title.

For the softball team, a winning season has included strong performances from its senior core as well several underclassmen stepping up into important contributing roles. Union/Cove will look for a late push on both the baseball and softball diamonds, as the soft-

ball team has put together a 16-5 regular season.

At Eastern Oregon University, the softball team wrapped up the program’s winningest season in the school’s history.

The Mountaineers finished just one game shy of a trip to the NAIA World Series final site, but have little to be ashamed about this season — the team piled up nine wins against ranked opponents and competed alongside the top programs in the country.

As the spring wraps up, East-

ern’s track athletes are set to travel to Gulf Shores, Alabama, to compete in the NAIA Outdoor Championships, which begin on Wednesday, May 25, and conclude on May 27.

As always, our recap coverage of local games will be available online at our website and other noteworthy stories will be published in the print editions.

■ *Davis Carbaugh covers news and sports for The Observer. He can be contacted at dcarbaugh@lagrandeobserver.com.*

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