

## SOFTBALL

Continued from Page A7

coming from the two seniors, who also combined to drive in 87 runs.

Kinzy Bowen's 12th was a two-run shot in the third inning on Tuesday, May 31, that tied the Tigers' semi-final showdown against Cascade at 3-all. The Cougars, though, scored two runs late to earn a 5-3 win and a matchup against Marist in the Class 4A title game June 4.

Led by the college-bound athletes, the Tigers rebounded nicely from a 1-4 start to reach the state semifinals. Three of those losses were to Idaho schools (including to the 5A state runner-up) and a fourth was to Hermiston. "The idea behind that, going to Idaho, is to let us know where we are at, where we're competing," Bowen said. "I don't want to go over there and play less caliber (teams). I want the best right off the bat. It helps with the RPI and the Colley (rankings). It makes a big difference."

Prior to the loss May 31, the only other setbacks for La Grande, which concluded with a record of 18-8, were two losses to

"It was nice to have a good season."

— **Cody Bowen**, LHS softball head coach

5A's top seed Pendleton, and to Ontario, which the Tigers beat last week in the 4A quarterfinals.

In classification, La Grande finished with a record of 15-2, and outscored its 4A opposition by a combined total of 194-34.

"They just started working better together, communicating and understanding the game as a team instead of as an individual," coach Bowen said.

He said errors played a part in the team not making it to the championship game, adding that he felt the team beat itself on May 31.

"This game is 90% mental, and if our heads aren't in the game, we're not going to win. It comes down to whoever shows up. We didn't," he said.

Even with the season ending short, Bowen said he was proud of the team's play all season, and he was thrilled to have a regular season after two years of play being impacted by COVID-19.

"It was nice to have a good season," he said.

## CARBAUGH

Continued from Page A7

students, staff and community of support are always there backing their teams. One of my favorite things to do is mingle between the softball and baseball fields when both teams are playing and listen to the chatter of fans and parents packing Pioneer Park to support their teams. There truly is a special sports environment in Union County, one that I will not soon forget.

This job, which was my first in the journalism field out of college, taught me many valuable les-

sons — working alongside Dick Mason also helped in that regard. More so, I have grown as a person in meeting new people every day and pushing myself outside of my comfort zone to create the best possible stories for this community's paper. I hope to have covered the local teams to the best of my abilities within the scope of time and resources available to me.

As I transition into a different role within the sports media field, I know that this little community in Eastern Oregon will always have a special place in my heart.

■ *Davis Carbaugh covered news and sports for The Observer.*

## BASEBALL

Continued from Page A7

Hidden Valley, meanwhile, enters on a 13-game winning streak and, like La Grande, has thrown shutouts in 15 contests.

"I feel like our team has really come together, is playing well, and I feel like we were a legitimate contender to be in the final game," McKinley said. "It's not a huge surprise to me that that's the matchup on Saturday (June 4)."

There are parallels between this La Grande team and the team that won a state title in 2017. Pitching was the calling card of the last championship team, as the Tigers had the top pitching staff in the state at the 4A level. That team was powered by the likes of GT Blackman, Brad Bell, Jon Gonzalez and Zack Jacobs, to name a few, and allowed just 70 runs — an ERA of 1.54 — on the way to a 23-3 mark and the championship.

This team is led on the mound by Devin Bell and a group who just a few years ago were playing for a spot in the Little League World Series — Sam



Isabella Crowley/The Observer  
**Pitcher Devin Bell and catcher Cole Jorgensen speak to coach Parker McKinley during La Grande's 8-0 victory over Philomath at Pioneer Park on Tuesday, May 31, 2022. The Tigers advanced to the OSAA Class 4A finals where they will play Hidden Valley at Volcanoes Stadium on June 4.**

Tsiatsos, Jace Schow, Logan Williams and Jarett Armstrong among them — and has posted a team ERA of 0.87.

The June 4 championship matchup will see La Grande aim for its third

championship on the diamond. LHS won the crown in 2007 and 2017, and was second in 2018 and 2021 (though last year's championship game was not sanctioned by the OSAA due to the pandemic).

The Tigers were also the No. 4 seed when they won the 2017 championship, yet hosted the semifinals due to their opponent (Astoria in 2017, Philomath this spring) upsetting the top seed in the quarterfinals (Hidden Valley and Banks, respectively).

Hidden Valley is playing in the championship for the third time, and aiming for its first title in an OSAA championship game. The team's other appearance was a loss in 2012 to Ontario.

The Mustangs, the No. 2 seed, enter with an offensive and defensive prowess similar to La Grande. Through 29 games, Hidden Valley has scored 312 runs and given up just 43. Hill, Nate Vidlak, Daniel Iwamizu and Nolan Kennedy are among the returning players for the Mustangs in search of a repeat.

"Them with Vidlak and Hill on the mound are as good as anybody at any level," McKinley said.

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