

**TITLE**

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staffs that have each recorded 15 shutouts. “Their team has been playing together (for) a long time, as well,” senior catcher Cole Jorgensen said. “They all seem super close, kind of like we are. I think they’re very similar.” McKinley expects the Tigers will face Hill on the mound, a Division I prospect who this season formed a solid 1-2 punch with Nate Vidlak, who shut down Mazama in the semifinals May 31, 10-1.

“You got a kid that is going to go to Oregon State next year to play baseball. If he’s eligible to pitch, it’s pretty hard not to put him on the mound,” McKinley said of Hill, who is a force both as a pitcher (school record 110 strikeouts) and at the plate (eight home runs).

Who La Grande counters with will be a game day decision, but McKinley has a plethora of arms at his disposal. Among them could be Jace Schow (9-0, 1.49 ERA), Sam Tsiatsos (6-0, 0.42 ERA) or Williams (2-0, 0.00 ERA). He’ll also have the option to use Bell for 25 pitches, with Bell coming off his no-hit performance May 31 in the Tigers’ 8-0 win over Philomath.

There really are no bad decisions for McKinley to turn to, as his team enters with a combined ERA of 0.84, a WHIP of 0.85 and 241 strikeouts to just 54 walks in 167 innings.

“The greatest thing about it is all of them will be ready to go. All of them will do what is asked by their coaches and their teammates and they’ll give it



Isabella Crowley/The Observer

**Nick Bornstedt turns toward third base 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, Keizer, on June 4.**

**LHS Baseball 2022 Season**

**SCHEDULE (27-1)**

Date	Opponent	Result
March 17	@Hermiston	W 12-2
March 17	@Hermiston	W 7-5
March 21	vs. Canby	W 4-1
March 22	vs. Shadow Ridge (AZ)	W 8-3
March 23	vs. Dakota Ridge (CO)	L 2-5
March 24	vs. Apollo (AZ)	W 12-1
April 1	@Seaside/Jewell	W 12-1
April 1	@North Marion	W 12-5
April 2	@Astoria	W 17-0
April 7	vs. Ontario	W 14-1
April 7	vs. Ontario	W 19-1
April 13	@Pendleton/Griswold	W 7-5
April 15	@McLoughlin	W 12-0

April 15	@McLoughlin	W 17-0
April 20	@Baker/Powder Valley	W 10-0
April 20	@Baker/Powder Valley	W 16-0
April 23	vs. Philomath	W 5-0
April 26	@College Place (WA)	W 12-0
April 29	@Ontario	W 31-0
April 29	@Ontario	W 21-0
May 3	vs. McLoughlin	W 10-0
May 3	vs. McLoughlin	W 12-0
May 13	vs. Baker/Powder Valley	W 8-0
May 13	vs. Baker/Powder Valley	W 4-0
May 20	vs. Pendleton/Griswold	W 4-3
May 25	vs. Marshfield	W 10-0
May 27	vs. Marist Catholic	W 10-4
May 31	vs. Philomath	W 8-0
June 4	vs. Hidden Valley	1:30 p.m.

100%,” McKinley said. “On game day, when it comes down to it, we see how everybody’s feeling, what my stomach is telling me, and we’ll go with it.” Bell has been a key

piece in the offense, as well, entering the game batting .541 with 10 home runs and 69 RBIs, but McKinley noted the balance in the team’s lineup and pointed to the effort in the Philo-

math game as evidence that anyone can step up to hit for the Tigers.

“We had seven guys that had hit, and we have guys on our bench that are ready to go,” he said. “We have a

whole bunch of guys that when they show up and they play for each other, they’re all deadly. If one guy is having an off day, he knows his teammates are going to pick him up. That’s what

this team is built on.” Indeed, as a team, the Tigers enter Saturday’s matchup with a .363 batting average. Four of their regulars have a batting average of .400 or better, and three more are above .300.

“I think a huge part of it is the chemistry we have,” Jorgensen said of the team’s success. “We’ve all been on the same team since we were super young. We know the ins and out of everybody. I think we all are just super connected on that level. One of our strengths is how complete we are as a team.”

McKinley also pointed to the brotherhood of the players as an element that has resulted in them reaching the championship, which he said was a goal from Day 1.

“They truly are like brothers out here, they hold each other accountable, they pick each other up, and they play for each other,” he said. “You start talking about all those things that go into what makes a team a team, they do it all really well.”

And because they have done it well all season — to the tune of 23 wins in a row and a 27-1 record overall — the Tigers are confident that although they are playing a strong team, if they perform to that level again Saturday, they’ll get a shot at the redemption they are after.

“Every time we step on the field we expect to win,” McKinley said. “At just the competitive level, we’re trying to get out there and do everything we can, top to bottom, to be prepared to win a game.”

Williams agreed. “I think if we play our game, we (have) got a really good chance,” he said.

**SHINING**

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credited those around him for his academic success. “It really came down to who I was hanging out with, and I had people that held me accountable,” he said. “It is the same for everything because if you want to get good at school then you have to hang around people that are going to push you. If you want to get good at sports, you have to hang around talented people who push you. It is the same recipe for success.”

The La Grande baseball team is 27-1 this season and will face Hidden Valley (27-2) in the championship game.

The Tigers will be playing in the championship for the fourth time in the last six years, and will be playing for its third state title. The Tigers won it all in 2007 and 2017, and placed second in 2018 and 2021.

Physical skills are important in sports and on the baseball diamond, but being able to process the mental side has helped the Tigers on their current run of success.

“Baseball is a very fundamental game and you always have to know what your job is and where to go with the ball,” said Jorgensen, who will play baseball at Western Oregon next season and study sports medicine.

“We talk a lot about how preparedness creates confidence, and when you can understand different situations in the game and learn from and apply them,

“Since I was a kid, I always wanted to graduate on the baseball field. Anything other than that would have been sad for me.”

— Braden Carson, graduating senior

it makes for special kids,” McKinley said.

La Grande finished tied for seventh in 4A in the OSAA’s academic all-state baseball teams with an average GPA of 3.37. It doesn’t happen by mistake.

“There has always been a focus on doing well in school and baseball,” Begin said. “It shows how much dedication we have toward what we do. Our coach brings up when someone is doing well in class all the time just to show our players can do both. When I was a freshman I heard that a lot of the top players on the field were doing well in the classroom, and I thought if I could do that it would be fantastic.”

Begin will attend Oregon Institute of Technology in the fall majoring in computer science.

None of the three will be at graduation to give a speech, but Carson, who is considering a biology major, said it is something he planned years ago.

“Since I was a kid, I always wanted to graduate on the baseball field,” he said. “Anything other than that would have been sad for me.”

**GOLF**

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LIV Golf Invitational Series. Oregon will be the second stop for LIV Golf. The Pumpkin Ridge event, originally scheduled for July 1-3, will begin one day earlier, June 30.

According to its website, tickets for the Pumpkin Ridge tournament range from \$70 to \$6,180.

Tourism officials have either distanced themselves from the event or completely dismissed it.

“I haven’t heard one

person who is excited it is coming here,” said Jim Etzel, CEO of Sport Oregon, the nonprofit that helps promote sports tourism.

Both Sport Oregon and Travel Oregon said their organizations played no role in bringing the event to Oregon.

“It wouldn’t have been an event we would have pursued,” said Etzel.

“The primary reason is — it just doesn’t align with the values of our sports community or, in my opinion, our community at large.”

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