

## EOU staff earn regional recognition

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University softball's coaching staff last week received regional honors after a historic 2022 season.

EOU finished the year at 43-17 overall and as the runner-up of the Oklahoma City Bracket in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics opening round after earning an at-large bid. The team's 43 wins now stands alone atop Eastern's record books for the most victories in a single season.

Coaching staffs of the National Fastpitch Coaches Association's NAIA regions on Wednesday,

June 1, announced their selections for staff of the year recognition. For Region IV, the honor went to EOU softball head coach Nicole Christian and her staff.



Christian

Entering the 2022 campaign, EOU was picked to finish fifth in the Cascade Collegiate Conference but easily exceeded expectations, according to an announcement from EOU Athletics. The team finished third in the regular season standings and at the CCC Tournament, registering a 24-6 mark in conference action.

The Mountaineers, ranked 15th in the final NAIA Coaches' Poll of the regular season, finished with five All-CCC selections. Garnering All-CCC honors for Eastern Oregon was Amanda Smith (pitcher), Grace Gaither (infielder), Caitlin Crist (infielder), Shelby Starr (outfielder) and Karsyn Zaragoza (outfielder). Five All-CCC selections are the most under Christian.

Christian also had her first pair of College Sports Information Directors of America Academic All-District selections in Kayla Berg and Taylor Dow. The senior duo were selected to the first team, Berg was selected as an outfielder, while Dow was selected as a designated player.

Christian finished her third season as head coach of Mountaineer softball in 2022. She is supported by assistant coaches Theresa Manley, Woody Wright, Bob Christian and volunteer assistant coach Taylor Smith.

Christian began her coaching career in 2001 when she was named the head softball coach for La Grande High School. She was with the Tigers from 2001-03, then spent some time in the junior college ranks as the head coach at Blue Mountain Community College from 2003-05.

Christian was the softball bench boss at Umatilla High School from 2005-08, then took the role as head softball coach and assistant girls basketball coach at McLoughlin High School, Milton-Freewater, starting in 2008. In 10 seasons as the softball coach, Christian's squad made the state tournament nine consecutive times. Mac-Hi also made four straight state championship game appearances and won back-to-back state titles in 2014 and 2015. During the 2018 campaign, she also picked up career win No. 300. She was inducted into the Mac-High Hall of Fame in 2018.

## Eastern Oregon Livestock Show rodeo brimming with top talent

By RONALD BOND

For The Observer

UNION — The "Oldest Show in the Northwest" is back for its 115th year.

And there will be an addition to the rodeo at this year's Eastern Oregon Livestock Show.

The EOLS is in full swing this week in Union, with the youth showmanship events already underway and auction, rodeos, horse racing and extreme bulls on the slate. The livestock show also will be the site of a unique show to wrap up the week Sunday morning, June 12.

Rodeo Director Darren Hansen said an event new to Union will be run during this year's rodeo performance — ladies breakaway roping. He said getting the event added to the day sheet has been a work in progress for a couple of years.

"We were trying to get a feel for it. Now we're doing it and (it) looks like a lot are doing it," Hansen said.

Indeed, Hansen said the event is jam-packed. There are 10 competitors scheduled all three days of the rodeo itself, and an additional 28 women set to compete in the slack portion outside of the rodeo's main run.

It's not the only rodeo event that is filled to the brim with talent, either. Hansen said there are 50 contestants signed up for the Ed Miller Xtreme Bulls event on June 9, which is the maximum number of slots available.

Last year's Ed Miller saw a tie between Ruger Piva and Payton Fitzpatrick, each turning in rides of 84 points and taking home more than \$3,400 — combining for more than half of the purse.

Piva is back to defend his title, and will be matched up against a field of former champions and local talent.

Among those currently slated to compete are Roscoe Jarboe, Jordan Spears and Parker Breeding, the 2019 champion.

Riders with local connections include Cody Campbell, of Summerville, Austin Miller, of Imbler, and Clayton Savage, who Hansen said is a Cove graduate. Derek Kolbaba, of Walla Walla, who grew up in Joseph, is also set to ride June 9. The Xtreme



East Oregonian, File

Derek Kolbaba, of Walla Walla, rides Don't Sweat It for 84.5 points during the 2018 Pendleton PBR Classic in the Happy Canyon Arena. Kolbaba, who grew up in Joseph, is slated to ride June 9, 2022, in the Ed Miller Xtreme Bull Riding event at the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show in Union.

Bull Riding starts at 6:30 p.m.

PRCA rodeo and horse racing begin at 4 p.m. June 10 and run through the weekend, kicking off at 2 p.m. June 11 and 1:30 p.m. June 12.

Last year's rodeo contestants took home a combined payout of more than \$51,000.

While he didn't have an explanation for why, Hansen said the June 10 and 12 slates are the fullest this weekend.

He did note that horse racing contestants are fewer than normal this year, and track conditions could further hamper racing given the recent rains. He doesn't expect the added moisture of recent weeks, though, to have an impact elsewhere in the arena.

"It shouldn't on the rodeo side. The only thing that would impede anything is if there were standing water," he said.

The final day on June 12

includes a free event starting at 10 a.m. featuring Todd Pierce, the founder of Riding High Ministries. During the event, Pierce, a pastor and former bareback riding champion, will train an unbroken horse. A free breakfast, starting at 8 a.m. is included with the event.

EOLS staff has been bustling to get ready, and EOLS President Dave Billings said the team is looking forward to "just getting this thing off the ground, and looking forward to better weather."

The 4-H and FFA showmanship already has been impacted by the wet spring, with horse showing that began June 6 moved from the arena to the grass parking lot due to damp conditions.

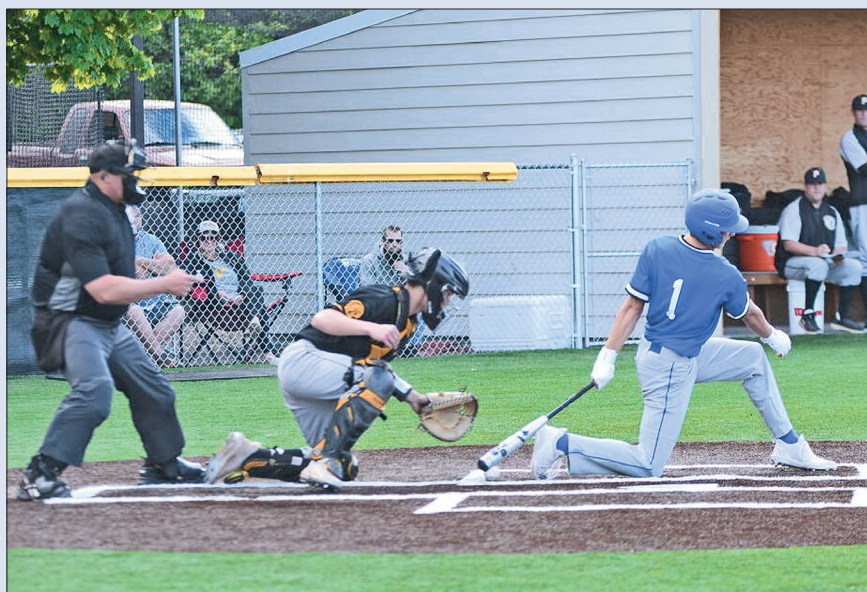
"That's probably the only thing (moving)," Billings said. "We have hopes of drier weather."



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Bull rider Ruger Piva, of Challis, Idaho, takes an 83-point ride on Louisiana Lightning to win the night on Friday, Aug. 13, 2021, during the Farm-City Pro Rodeo in Hermiston. Piva returns to Union's Eastern Oregon Livestock Show in 2022 to defend his 2021 title, and will be matched up against a field of former champions and local talent.

## SPORTS SHORT



Isabella Crowley/The Observer

Jace Schow swings at pitch during La Grande's 8-0 victory over Philomath at Pioneer Park, La Grande, on Tuesday, May 31, 2022. The Tigers advanced to the OSAA Class 4A finals where they will play Hidden Valley at Volcanoes Stadium in Keizer.

## Championship baseball, softball games delayed

By NIK STRENG

The Oregonian

SALEM — In a seemingly fitting end to the 2022 spring season, the Oregon School Activities Association has had to postpone a couple of state championship baseball and softball games due to weather.

On Saturday, June 4, less than an hour before games were scheduled to start, the OSAA announced that the Class 5A baseball game would be delayed to 10:30 a.m. to give crews more time to tend to the field. The original start time was 10 a.m.

The OSAA added that

the 4A and 6A classification championship games would be moved to June 7.

The Class 4A championship baseball game will be on Tuesday with No. 4 La Grande vs. No. 2 Hidden Valley at 3 p.m. The Class 6A championship game will be No. 14 Canby vs. No. 4 West Linn at 6 p.m.

In softball, the 4A game will be No. 2 Cascade vs. No. 1 Marist Catholic at 3 p.m. on June 7 and the 6A game will be No. 3 Oregon City vs. No. 1 Tigard at 6 p.m.

La Grande will be aiming for its third state baseball title when it meets the Mustangs at Volcanoes Stadium in Keizer.

The game is a rematch of last year's 4A title game, which was not sanctioned by the OSAA. La Grande dropped the title game that day, 5-2, when Isaac Hill hit a two-out walk-off grand slam for Hidden Valley.

The teams have been on a proverbial collision course for the rematch all season, routing opponents left and right, and piling up similar numbers. Both teams enter with 27 wins — La Grande at 27-1, Hidden Valley at 27-2. Both teams average around 11 runs per game, have solid defense and strong pitching staffs that have each recorded 15 shutouts.