



Ronald Bond/For The Observer

Players on coach Marji Lind's team celebrate after winning the championship of the Oregon all-star volleyball match Saturday, June 18, 2022, at Eastern Oregon University's Quinn Coliseum.

Top talent

Northeastern Oregon volleyball well represented during all-star contest

By RONALD BOND
For The Observer

LA GRANDE — The annual Oregon all-star volleyball match has consistently brought high-level talent from across the state — and Northeastern Oregon — to Quinn Coliseum each year.

That was no different on Saturday, June 18, though this year there was a unique local aspect.

All six Union County schools were represented among the 34 athletes who took part in the event, showing that the local talent doesn't come from only one or two schools in the region.

"I think it means that our district, and around here, were really good" at volleyball, said Cove's Rachel Baird.

Baird was joined locally by Union's Kaylin Nowak, Powder Valley's Trinity Nesser, Elgin's Erika Adams, Imbler's Joelle Treat and La Grande's Shelby Burgess.

"I think that's really cool," Burgess said. "I think it's nice that all of us in Union County are coming together to represent Eastern Oregon. I think it's really cool for all of us to be able to get the opportunity to play together."

Add in Wallowa's Haley Brockamp and seven Northeastern Oregon schools had an athlete present on the Eastern Oregon University campus.

"We live in a rural area, so I think it says there's a lot of talent in a small community," Nowak said. "There's not a bunch of club teams around here, a bunch of resources for us to play year-round, but we're still devoted to playing volleyball."



Ronald Bond/For The Observer

Union's Kaylin Nowak tips the ball across the net during the Oregon all-star volleyball match Saturday, June 18, 2022, at Quinn Coliseum, La Grande.

The event brought athletes from all corners of the state to La Grande, giving most the opportunity to don a uniform one more time — though some of the players will continue their volleyball careers at the college level.

The players had one practice together late on June 17 before playing in best-of-three matches starting the next morning, meaning the turnaround from meeting their teammates to stepping on the court was quick.

"I think it's a lot of fun being able to play again, especially with a new group of girls, because I'm so used to playing with the same girls for four years straight now," Treat said. "I think we all connected really well. That's really cool. I'm having a lot of fun, and I'm glad I got this opportunity."

Adams, a self-described extrovert, said she found joy in the experience and in sharing a passion with the other athletes, most of whom she had never met before.

"It's a brand-new experience. It kind of gives you an idea, also, if you were to continue and pursue sports what it would be like being able to play with

girls that you meet (at the next level)," she said. "Even with this being a quick experience, just two days, I'm able to make friends and learn how to play with other types of people."

Brockamp said the process of learning to play together quickly ended up being different than she anticipated.

"I thought it was going to be really difficult, because you only have one hour (to) practice, but it's been really fun, and we actually mesh really good. We just have to communicate," she said.

The athletes were divided into four teams, coached by either Marji Lind, of Powder Valley, Baker City's Ali Abrego, Joseph's Jill Hite or St. Paul's Lesli Hiller. Team Lind and Team Abrego won the early matches in two sets to set up the championship battle. Team Hiller defeated Team Hite in three sets in the third-place match, and Team Lind won the championship over Team Abrego in two sets.

Treat, Nesser and Baird were all members of Lind's team. Hite's team included Burgess and Brockamp, Nowak was on Abrego's team and Adams was on Hiller's squad.

The athletes said they were appreciative of the opportunity to step on the court one more time, and for Nesser, it also meant getting to not only play under Lind one more time but getting to play at EOU — where she said she has watched several matches.

"It's really nice to play with people that are at our same skill level and play with people we played against (previously)," she said. "My team is great. We talk a lot, we really have clicked. I appreciate that, and I appreciate getting to play for Marji again."

Treat noted that it felt good to be playing in the all-star contest.

"I know I worked very hard my whole high school career. It feels rewarding to have my hard work pay off right now," she said. "Even though we're not playing for a big title, it's still a big honor to be able to do this."

And, for most, it was a great swan song before heading to the next stage of life.

"I think it's kind of the last hurrah before we head off to college," Baird said, "and it's nice to be able to play one last time."

SPORTS SHORT

Chargers' Herbert on working vacation until training camp

The Associated Press

COSTA MESA, Calif. — Justin Herbert's summer vacation began last week when the Los Angeles Chargers ended their offseason program.

Even though the Chargers have the next six weeks off before reporting for training camp, Herbert will use that time as more of a working vacation.

"I think the great thing about football for me is I need football. I love waking up and going to work and lifting, running, throwing and watching film," said Herbert, a former University of Oregon star. "I think too much off time can kind of be a burden to me sometimes, so I always look forward to having stuff to do."

"I feel like I just get bored sometimes without football. Saturdays and Sundays are nice, but at the same time, I'd rather be playing and

having something to do because I hate hanging around my house and not doing or accomplishing anything."

While the defense spent the past couple of months getting new players acclimated, Herbert and the offense didn't have as many challenges. First-round pick Zion Johnson was the unit's biggest offseason addition as he is expected to start at right guard when the season opens on Sept. 11 against the Las Vegas Raiders.

Herbert — who threw for 5,014 yards and 38 touchdowns en route to making the Pro Bowl last season — said the biggest benefit of the offseason workouts was getting to do drills in seven-on-seven situations, which is something they didn't get a chance to do last year because of COVID-19 restrictions and while trying to learn a new offense.

"We covered plenty of topics. I

feel like we're miles ahead of where we were last year at this point. So it's up to us to just keep getting better," Herbert said.

The fact that the focus was almost entirely on football was perfect for coach Brandon Staley.

After generating plenty of headlines with their March signings in free agency, the Chargers were mostly under the radar during their offseason program.

That's fine for Staley and company as they hope to have everyone's attention late in the season as they attempt to make the playoffs for the first time since 2018 after going 9-8 last season.

Staley was not only pleased with the perfect attendance the past two days, but also that almost all of his notable players had been in the complex for at least the past three weeks, with most being there since the program began on April 18.



Jae C. Hong/The Associated Press

Los Angeles Chargers quarterback Justin Herbert walks across the field during practice at the NFL football team's practice facility Wednesday, June 15, 2022, in Costa Mesa, California.