

Union County athletes strike gold

In all, eight gold medals return from regional Special Olympics

By RONALD BOND
For The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union County athletes claimed eight gold medals in track during the regional Special Olympics games in Hermiston July 16, and two additional gold medals in the regional golf tournament in Oregon City on July 17.

Leading the way for the track team was Amanda Herbert, who took gold in both the 400-meter walk and the 800-meter walk.

A pair of other athletes earned both a gold and a silver medal: Jennifer Coppin had gold in the 100-meter walk and silver in the softball throw, and Pete Crowell flipped those results, taking gold in the softball throw and silver in the 100-meter walk.

Dennis Adams earned gold in his division of the softball throw, and bronze in the 100-meter walk. Also getting a gold/bronze result was Dani Thorne, who took the top spot and gold in the 800-meter run and bronze in the softball throw; Jason Franks, who won gold in the 800-meter walk and bronze in the 400-meter walk; and R'Anne Werner, who took gold in the 100-meter dash and bronze in the softball throw.

Tommy Boren took two silver medals, one in the 50-meter walk and one in the softball throw, and Judith Asper earned a fifth-place ribbon in the softball throw.

"They all did an amazing job," said Lis Throne, local program co-coordinator for Union County. "It was a lot of fun to be doing it again. All the athletes from all the counties that were there were all so excited to see each other again."

The next day, Nick Mendiguren and Brandon Cooper, both first-year competitors in golf, took first in their respective divisions on the course. Cooper won gold in Division M3 of individual skills play, and Mendiguren won gold in M4 of individual skills play.

Another first-time competitor, Alex Weissenfluh, won the silver medal in nine-hole individual play.

In nine-hole alternate shot play, Ian Altenburg and unified partner Patrick Vaughn won a silver medal in Division M1, and Remy Spangler and Larry Bare, unified partner, won silver in Division M2.

Rounding out the medalists was Bradley Culver, taking bronze in Division M2 of individual skills play.



Union County Special Olympics/
Contributed Photo
Union County's Alex Weissenfluh gets ready to putt on Sunday, July 17, 2022, at Stonecreek Golf Club in Oregon City during the 2022 Special Olympics Oregon Regional Golf Tournament. Weissenfluh took second place in nine-hole individual play.

Softball squad extends successful season

La Grande Little League softball team headed to regional tournament for trip to Little League World Series in Arizona

By RONALD BOND
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LA GRANDE — Gary Krantz said team unity has been a key for the La Grande Little League juniors softball team.

Krantz, the manager of that squad, has witnessed that firsthand this summer as the team has gone undefeated — 18-0 — won a state championship, and starting this weekend will represent the state at the West Regional Tournament in Arizona.

"The thing (head coach) Rob (Harnack) and I coach the most is the way a team represents a family on the field and when they're off that field," Krantz said. "We do our best to build unity, and that's what these girls do — they come together (and) they support one another. We're very big on teaching that."

The team united in a big way last weekend, claiming the state championship July 15-17 in Redmond. La Grande defeated Crook County, and twice defeated Klamath Falls, including in the championship, 12-9, on Sunday, July 17.

La Grande opened with a win over Klamath Falls in its first game on July 15, 9-4, to reach the semifinals. La Grande followed up with a 4-0 shutout of Crook County on July 16 to reach the championship round.

Klamath Falls shook off the early loss and earned three straight



The La Grande Little League juniors softball team holds the banner after winning the state tournament Sunday, July 17, 2022, in Redmond.

Contributed Photo

wins — over Corvallis, Clackamas and Crook County — to reach the final, but came up short in the rematch.

The team carried some momentum and mettle built during the district tournament championship — one that saw them win despite being hampered with errors — into state, and kept rolling.

"This weekend, I don't know what it was — sometimes our bigger hitters weren't hitting, and then our ones that weren't always our best hitters stepped up," Krantz said. "It actually fell together. It was nice."

The team is made up of 11 players who have all contributed in some fashion to the team's undefeated run. La Grande has formidable pitchers, solid hitters and versatile players all around the field.

"When you show up to play like these girls do when it's game time, it's great. It's fun to watch when it all clicks," the coach said. "Sometimes it's softball, it's still Little League, there's still errors, they're learning, but every single one of

these girls is coachable. I've got girls that have played since they were 4 years old and they're still learning. That's a big part of winning is their attitude, the way they do it. They're phenomenal. I've coached a lot of them a lot of years. They're pretty good, and they're a lot of fun."

Izabelle Martin, the team's captain, most experienced player and starting pitcher, is excited about what the team has accomplished.

"I think it's really impressive that we're a really young team and we've made it this far," she said. "I've never gone to regionals before, so doing it with such a young group and all these girls, it's really good."

Krantz said the community has jumped behind this team in its run for regionals. The team had a short turnaround to get ready for the tournament, leaving Thursday, July 21, for an 18-hour drive ahead of their Saturday, July 23, opener. That has left them with just a few days to fundraise and get ready for the trip, but the backing is arriving quickly. Two gofundme.

FOLLOW THE TOURNAMENT

The West Regional Tournament can be tracked on Gamechanger at <https://bit.ly/3ojCsrz>. To support the team, its gofundme pages are <https://bit.ly/3PBUzR> or <https://bit.ly/3cuqlj2>.

com accounts have been set up to help fund travel to Arizona, and as of late July 19, had about \$5,000 raised between the two.

"The support that we've had from the community trying to get these girls down to Arizona is actually overwhelming at times," Krantz said. "A lot of parents, a lot of coaches are teary-eyed at some things."

Once the team arrives, La Grande opens play at 8 a.m. July 23, against Marana Little League out of Arizona, one of nine teams competing for a spot in the Little League World Series. They'll be battling against teams from Arizona, Washington, California, Utah, Nevada and Alaska for that World Series bid. The championship, should La Grande advance, is July 27.

Krantz knows the team will face good opposition.

"We're going to see some competition down there that we don't see, and that's great for these girls," he said. "I'm just hoping that by the end, when the dust clears, we've got one or two more runs than they do. Obviously the goal in our mind is to go to the World Series, which would be phenomenal and so much fun for these girls, but as long as we play ball and leave everything on the field every time and we keep our heads up and pick each other up, we'll do just fine."

The key, Martin said, will be for the team to enjoy itself.

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