

ON DECK

All times Pacific

Saturday, Sept. 3

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

EOU at Montana Western, noon

COLLEGE VOLLEYBALL

EOU at Bushnell, 5 p.m.

PREP FOOTBALL

Dufur Classic

Enterprise vs. Mohawk, 10 a.m.

lone/Arlington vs. Wallowa,

7:30 p.m.

PREP VOLLEYBALL

Pine Eagle at Imbler, 10 a.m.

Tuesday, Sept. 6

PREP VOLLEYBALL

Enterprise at Imbler, 5:30 p.m.

PREP BOYS SOCCER

La Grande at McLoughlin, 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Sept. 7

PREP GIRLS SOCCER

La Grande at Seaside, 3 p.m.

Thursday, Sept. 8

PREP VOLLEYBALL

Wallowa at Imbler, 5 p.m.

Baker at Powder Valley, 6 p.m.

Friday, Sept. 9

COLLEGE VOLLEYBALL

EOU at Lewis-Clark State, 7 p.m.

PREP FOOTBALL

Enterprise at Imbler, 2 p.m.

La Grande at Ontario, 6 p.m.

Elgin at Lyle, 6 p.m.

Wallowa at Sherman, 6 p.m.

Harper Charter at Joseph, 7 p.m.

Cove at Lone, 7 p.m.

Union at Powder Valley, 7 p.m.

PREP VOLLEYBALL

Elgin at Pilot Rock, 4 p.m.

Wallowa at Sherman, 4 p.m.

Cove at Powder Valley, 5 p.m.

Joseph at South Wasco County,

5 p.m.

Union at Pilot Rock, 5:30 p.m.

PREP CROSS COUNTRY

Enterprise, Elgin, Imbler,

Union/Cove at Catherine Creek

Scamper, 4 p.m.

La Grande at Runner Soul Fest,

Big River Golf Course, Umatilla,

5 p.m.

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Wanted: volleyball officials

Shortage of high school officials causes concern

By DICK MASON
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Jennifer Stephens, a volleyball official for the past 30 years, remembers a time when the Union, Wallowa and Baker county region was flush with high school volleyball officials.

The La Grande resident said it was sometimes hard for less-experienced officials to get the match assignments they wanted because the region had almost a surplus of referees. The days when the Northeast Oregon Volleyball Association, which provides officials for high school matches in Union, Wallowa and Baker counties, had plenty of referees are a distant memory.

The association is down to 16 officials this season, up two from a year ago but still well short of the optimum 20 to 24 officials needed, said Karen Howton, of Island City.

This means local volleyball officials will be stretched thin again this year.

“Last season, I was officiating five or six days a week. By the end of the season, I was dead tired. It is easy to get burned out,” Howton said.

Stephens agrees the shortage puts great pressure on officials.

“We are on the run from the start of the season until the last playoff game,” she said. “I don’t get to see much of my family during that time.”

The shortage of officials means that high school athletic directors will again be busy rescheduling games when many teams are set to compete at home on the same day.

“You have to be flexible so everybody can play,” said La Grande High School Athletic Director Darren Goodman, adding that, for example, on Tuesdays when La Grande, Baker and Powder Valley high schools are all set to play at home, he will try to move La Grande’s game to a Monday or a Wednesday.

Imbler High School Athletic Director Mike Mills also said a lot of schedule juggling is done to make sure the referee shortage does not prevent any matches from being played.

“There is a lot of give and take,” he said.

Heidi Justus, commissioner of the Northeast Oregon Volleyball Association, credits athletic directors with being very accommodating.

“The athletic directors are really great to work with,” she said.

Justus said the shortage of officials is partially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She said that prior to the pandemic, the Northeast Oregon Volleyball Association had 16 to 18 officials. Some who stopped officiating during the pandemic have not returned, she said.

Stephens believes one of the best ways



Isabella Crowley/The Observer
Angie Malone, of La Grande, makes a call Saturday, Aug. 27, 2022, at the Hanna Cashell Memorial Tournament at La Grande High School. Malone is among the volleyball officials who belong to the Northeast Oregon Volleyball Association, which serves schools in Union, Wallowa and Baker counties.



Isabella Crowley/The Observer
Avery Myer sets up for a serve against Ontario during pool play at the Hanna Cashell Memorial Tournament on Saturday, Aug. 27, 2022, at La Grande High School. A shortage of volleyball officials has athletic directors and coaches concerned about potentially canceled games this season.

MORE INFORMATION

The Northeast Oregon Volleyball Association provides training for everyone who wants to become an official. It is now signing up people for training prior to the 2023 season. People who are interested in serving as officials for the should email Heidi Justus at neovba@gmail.com.

said, girls will not experience the joy of playing high school volleyball.

“We need to focus on the excitement of helping girls do something fun, which helps keep them in school,” Stephens said.

Howton, who has officiated volleyball for 21 years, also said she is driven to keep going because of what it means to the girls playing, student-athletes she gets to see grow up right before her eyes, while officiating not only high school but also middle school matches.

“I love every one of them,” she said.

The camaraderie officials share is also cherished by Howton.

“You have fun traveling together. You get to know each other well. Some of my dearest friends are volleyball officials,” she said.

Volleyball officials are paid about \$67 for matches involving schools in the Class 4A to 6A enrollment classifications and about \$64 for games of schools in the smaller 3A and below classifications. It’s not a lot, but Stephens said it is a sum people like college students would welcome.

“What student could not use a few extra dollars in their pocket?” she said.

Eastern ready to put lessons learned on road trip to good use

Mountaineers host Jamestown in home opener on Sept. 5

By ANDREW CUTLER
The Observer

LA GRANDE — There were a lot of positives to the Eastern Oregon University women’s soccer team’s season-opening trip to Florida last month.

The Mountaineers came away with some valuable experience, improved team chemistry and, most important, a pair of wins during the excursion to southern Florida.

“(The trip) was a good indicator of where we can

go. And the potential that this group has, if they can keep working hard,” EOU head coach Jake Plocher said of the games against No. 6 Keiser, St. Thomas and Ave Maria. “We feel pretty comfortable and confident as long as we can keep progressing.”

The Mountaineers dropped their opener against Kaiser, 3-0, before rallying for a pair of 1-0 wins over St. Thomas and Ave Maria. Keiser won national titles in 2020 and 2021, the first since team since Lee University to win back-to-back national championships.

The Flames claimed four straight from 2008-11.

Plocher said the Hawks were a good test for the Mountaineers to start the season.

“There were some good things, obviously some first-game jitters and errors that were made, but going into game two and even game three, we did a much better job of kind of cleaning that up,” the sixth-year head coach said.

Plocher, who is 66-19-11 at Eastern, said the Mountaineers were much better controlling possession in the two wins and sophomore goalie

Madeline Barker was rock solid in net.

“I think Maddie is one of the best goalies in the nation,” he said. “She’s really been able to make strides from her freshman year. Going into game two and game three, she did a good job of putting game one behind her. She wasn’t tested as much obviously but was able to organize the defense, and the defense definitely played lights out those two games as well.”

Plocher said the trip was an opportunity for an already close-knit bunch to spend more time together and bond.

“That’s just a byproduct of being on the road for six to eight days,” he said. “It

gives them an opportunity to really get to know one another. It was nice to be able to do that.”

The Mountaineers open the home schedule on Monday, Sept. 5, against the University of Jamestown from the Great Plains Athletic Conference. While this is the first matchup between the teams, the Jimmies are a program Plocher has knowledge of from his time at Presentation College in Aberdeen, South Dakota.

“I’m fairly familiar with Jamestown and even their coaching staff. So it’s great that they’re gonna be able to come down,” he said. “They had a great year last year. They won the GPAC and made it to the national

tournament. So to be able to have a team of that caliber out this way is nice.”

Jamestown, which is off to an 0-2-0 start, following losses to No. 9 Aquinas College and No. 10 University of the Cumberlands, will meet No. 4 Oregon Institute of Technology on Sept. 2 and Northwest University on Sept. 4 in La Grande before the matchup with the Mountaineers.

Plocher is excited about the chance to see the Jimmies play in person before squaring off on the pitch.

“We have an opportunity to watch them play a couple of times to get a better feel for them,” he said. “Should be a fun game.”



THE OBSERVER

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