

Sports+Outdoors

Fall sports begin official practices

BY BRIAN RATHBONE
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The fall high school sports season kicked off August 15 with the first official practices held across Oregon.

During the next couple of weeks, teams will go through tryouts and create their squads before kicking off competition the final week of August.

"All the same feelings are there," said Bend High girls soccer coach Alyssa Dalgleish, who is entering her second year leading the program. "You're excited, nervous, ready. You kinda know what you have coming back ... incoming freshman you never know what you have."

The 2022 fall prep sports season is new, yet familiar. New faces in familiar uniforms. New conference alignment with all too familiar teams. All with the return to sports normalcy after two-plus years of uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

"I think we are back to normal ... knock, knock, knock (on wood)," said Mountain View football coach Brian Crum. "That has been really nice for continuity of the high school program."

"We had spring football like it has always been," he added. "We had a chance to go to our Linfield team camp which was huge for growth. A summer that allowed our guys to lift in the weight room and improve. And we are in fall camp. I think the last two years are behind us. We will take normalcy and how that helps kids as long as we can have it."

COVID-19 is not nearly as prominent in high school sports as it was this time a year ago.

As of now, there are no major COVID-19 restrictions in place like those that postponed the 2020 fall season into spring 2021 and forced the cancellation of practices and games in 2021. And, there have not



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Lily Castillo lunges to stop a shot during a Bend High girls soccer practice Tuesday.

been forest fires that polluted the air quality this time last year and altered practices and games.

For this year's senior classes, it is the first time since their freshman years that they have enjoyed a prototypical start to the fall sports season.

"It is strange," said Bend High girls soccer player Jordan Welsh. "Freshman year we had a normal soccer season, but that was about it."

"It is taking us a little to warm up," added senior Brianna Vidali-Rood. "But we are getting there."

At this time a year ago, the Bend High and Mountain View football teams had COVID-19 outbreaks

on their first day of practice, forcing some members of the teams into quarantine during the first week of practice.

A year later, they are able to hold tryouts just as they did before the pandemic.

"From that point on the whole season was just juggling and trying to catch up from that," Crum said. "From the beginning of the spring until now, we are so much farther ahead than we were. Leadership development, weight room time, individual scheme development, we are in a much better place. It is good for our kids and good for what we are going

to accomplish this year."

Due to the addition last year of Bend's Caldera High, which is now playing a varsity schedule for the first time, this coming year will also have a familiar return to the six largest Central Oregon high schools competing in the same conference as they last did from 2013 to 2017.

The now four Bend-area high schools (Bend, Summit, Mountain View and Caldera) are rejoining the two Redmond schools (Redmond and Ridgeview) in the Class 5A Intermountain Conference after four years of being in different classifications and leagues.

The longest distance the six schools will have to travel for league play now is the 17 or so miles between Bend and Redmond, rather than having to travel as far as Salem, The Dalles or Pendleton for league games as they had to do the past four years.

"Selfishly, it is a little nice to not travel to Salem every week," Dalgleish said. "It's nice to have us all in Central Oregon."

With practices now underway, teams are building toward their regular-season openers that begin as early as Aug. 25.

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Bend schools set to join Redmond in 5A

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When Oregon high school sports realigned conferences and classifications eight months ago, schools from Central Oregon perhaps had the most significant changes.

Due to the addition last year of Bend's Caldera High, which is now playing a varsity schedule for the first time, this year all high schools in Bend and Redmond will compete in the same conference as they last did from 2013 to 2017.

The now four Bend-area high schools (Bend, Summit, Mountain View and Caldera) are rejoining the two Redmond schools (Redmond and Ridgeview) in the Class 5A Intermountain Conference after four years of being in different classifications and leagues.

Bend, Summit and Mountain View spent the last four years in Class 6A.

While there were teams that had some troubles replicating the same success they enjoyed before moving up to 6A in 2018, the Summit girls cross-country and Summit boys soccer teams spent the last four years thriving and winning state championships in Oregon's highest classification.

This fall, those same teams are moving down a classification.

"It is what it is. There is not much we can do about it now," said Summit boys soccer coach Joe LoCascio.

"We just have to prepare now for this season. We are already, as a program, past last season. We now have a 5A campaign that we have to take care of."

In its three complete seasons in Class 6A, Summit boys soccer reached three state title games and won the state championship last year to cap an undefeated season.

The Summit girls cross-country team won all the Class 5A team titles between 2008 and 2017.

The Storm wasted little time claiming the throne as



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Claire McDonald, from left, Barrett Justema and Ella Thorsett run in Bend's Discovery Park during Summit High School's cross-country practice Wednesday.



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Summit High's Grayson Barker, left, and Bowen Teuber fight for the ball during boys soccer practices Wednesday.

the state's top cross-country team, winning Class 6A state titles in all three chances it had.

Summit narrowly beat Jesuit for the 6A title last fall by

three points and did so without a single runner finishing in the top five (but four in the top 10).

Based on its runners' times, Summit would have had the

top four placers in the 5A state championship meet.

"Of course there is a little disappointment because it is fun to go to the line with the biggest and deepest schools,"

said Summit cross-country coach Kari Strang. "We are just going into the mindset to make the best we can of it. Fortunately, we still have strong competition in the (Intermountain Conference) and we are thankful for that."

Rumors of the potential move from 6A to 5A started long before the executive board of the Oregon School Activities Association voted to approve it last December. Still, when the move became official it had mixed reviews.

"At first I was really upset because last year we had a super close finish at state and we wanted to come back and get it one last time against Jesuit," said senior Ella Thorsett, who won the 4A cross-country state title as a freshman at Sisters in 2019 and was Summit's highest placer at last year's 6A state meet.

"But we are still going to go to a lot of invitationals. Obviously it is going to affect state but we also have some races past state that we can still

look forward to. So I've come to terms with it."

Summit senior Barrett Justema said that there might not be a sport better suited to handle change than cross-country. While most sports' seasons end after the state championship, cross-country has regional and national meets that the Storm compete in yearly. Summit won the 2018 national title and finished second in 2019.

"I think we have the luckiest sport to have (the change) in," Justema said. "We still get to race against the big schools and in a way it helps us see our bigger goals of regionals and nationals. State is still a huge goal, but (the change) helps us focus on different things as well."

Similarly, LoCascio said that the timing worked out nicely for the Summit boys soccer program. Last year's state title team was a hungry squad loaded with seniors who had played in multiple 6A title games before finally breaking through to claim the championship in dominating fashion.

"It would have been much harder to take that group last year and then have them playing in 5A, that would have been a challenge for them," LoCascio said. "This is so different now you can't really compare the two. The message this year has been re-create, reinvent, and not replicate and not even look back at last year."

Even still, championships are not won on paper. Teams and athletes must meet the challenges that the season brings. Games have to be played and races have to be run to claim championships, which is no easy task in any classification.

"I don't look at anyone on our schedule and go, 'We should have a training session because we are going to beat them in the first half,'" LoCascio said. "That is just not how the sport goes. Anything can happen."

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