

Shortage of officials splinters sports calendars

BY NICK ROSENBERGER
Redmond Spokesman

The booming population of Central Oregon can be felt in all walks of daily life — from the traffic on roads to fighting for chairlifts at Mt. Bachelor — but parents and students may be feeling the growth most acutely in sports as the region struggles to fill gaps in officiating. Athletic directors have been forced to cancel JV games and reschedule varsity dates as officials and referees work themselves to the bone for little pay and not much more than a love for the game. For some sports, the state of officiating has reached a crisis level.

“We are just doing everything we can to try to recruit,” said Tad Cockerill, Central Oregon’s baseball and softball commissioner, who is in charge of placing officials for those sports. “The numbers just aren’t there.”

Cockerill said he’s had to overwork officials so much that some are working six days a week. One official worked 87 games from March to August, then went straight into officiating football and now into wrestling.

“We’re wearing these people out,” Cockerill said. “We just are asking our officials to do too much.”

Mehdi Salari, Central Oregon’s soccer commissioner, said a lot of the soccer referees are 50 or older and that hardly anyone gets a day off. This, he said, puts a lot of miles on their legs as they run back and forth on the soccer pitch.

“We sort of limped over the season,” Salari said. The commissioners, while agreeing on certain reasons for the downturn, also see different causes. Some point fingers at the COVID-19 pandemic, some blame the low pay, others say it’s hard to recruit referees with the steady abuse hurled at them from parents and fans.

Revamped schedules These various explanations have coalesced into a problem that has left school athletic directors scrambling to have enough officials available to play games.

“The biggest thing has been scheduling,” said Doug Taylor, athletic director for Redmond High School. “We’ve had to be creative with what we’re doing.”

See **Officials** / A1



LOCAL

Feast on food

New restaurant opens in Redmond. **A3**



Austin Looney fires a hose on Dec. 6 at a Redmond Fire & Rescue training center in Redmond while practicing to become a firefighter.

Nick Rosenberger/Spokesman

FACE THE FLAMES

Firefighters prepare for the rigors of the job

BY NICK ROSENBERGER • Redmond Spokesman

Beau Bigo bolted out of the fire engine, grabbed a hose, ran the line out through slush and ice before looping around to face a constructed wooden maze in front of him. Crouching down in his brown fire gear, he pulled the handle back and shot water out of the hose with a hiss.

This scene played out through the cold Dec. 6 day as nine Redmond Fire & Rescue trainees plunged through week four of their eight-week training program to reach their graduation a month later.

The group, the largest Redmond Fire & Rescue has trained at one time, will help fill a growing need in the city’s emergency services as the fire department tries to keep pace with Redmond’s tremendous growth.

“I’m super excited because with us nine comes a whole bunch of new changes,” said Bigo, one of the trainees. “This is going to be a turning point for the department.”

With a projected increase of 50,000 residents, which will more than double Redmond’s current population, the fire department has struggled to fill open positions and reach the basic national standard of three firefighters per engine.

Many firefighters have been working overtime on scheduled days off in order to respond to the increasing number of calls as the



Redmond Fire & Rescue trainees laugh during a training session on Dec. 6 in Redmond.

Nick Rosenberger/Spokesman

city continues to grow.

The new firefighters, however, will help take some of the pressure off and allow them to reach national standards — which is a major accomplishment according to training captain Bill Welch.

“The fact that we’re able to hire this many people, that in itself is just hopeful,” Bigo said. “You feel supported by the community.”

But, the training isn’t easy. The group starts early — before most people’s morning alarms begin to go off. With a gym session at 6:30 a.m., class from 8 a.m. until noon and hands-on skills and techniques until around 5 p.m., the four long days of training per week are exhausting but rewarding for the trainees.

See **Firefighters** / A9

New downtown developments

Mercantile, off-leash dog park attached to food cart pods

BY NICK ROSENBERGER AND TIM TRAINER
Redmond Spokesman

Two new food truck pods — one with a meat market attached and another combined with an off-leash dog park — will soon be coming to downtown Redmond.

The Blacksmith Public House, which will include a partnership with a 4,000-square-foot smokehouse and mercantile, is slated to open in late March or early April. The Doghouse Brewery is expected to open in February.

According to Jordan Raney, general manager of the Blacksmith Public House, their new operations will feature two fire pits, a deck and an indoor seating area with a full bar. They are also hoping to add a coffee shop to the location as well.

The development will be built at the intersection of SW 4th and SW Evergreen Ave.

“It’s going to have a little bit of everything for everyone,” Raney said.

According to Raney, the building, which was formerly a blacksmith shop, will have a stage for live music and offer 12 taps, simple cocktails as well as seltzers and ciders.

See **Downtown** / A4



Nick Rosenberger/Spokesman

Construction has picked up speed at the site of the future Blacksmith Food Truck Pod on 4th and SW Evergreen Ave. in Redmond. The new food truck pod will feature six food trucks and an indoor venue with 12 taps and event space.

WEATHER FORECAST

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Partly cloudy
33/11



WEDNESDAY
Partly cloudy
29/9



THURSDAY
Rain, snow
27/9



FRIDAY
Partly cloudy
26/6



SATURDAY
Partly cloudy
24/5



SUNDAY
Partly cloudy
22/7



MONDAY
Snow showers
25/6

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