

Just like old times: A home playoff win for Astoria

Both Knappa teams advance

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

Welcome back to the quarterfinals, Astoria baseball. It's been a while.

To be exact, the last time the Fishermen were a part of the Elite Eight was 2011, their last championship season.

And a four-year absence from the quarterfinals — by Astoria baseball standards — is way too long.

The Fishermen took care of that Wednesday night, with an 11-2 win over Estacada at Aiken Field in the first round of the Class 4A state playoffs.

It was Astoria's first state playoff victory since the 4-1 decision over North Valley in the 2011 state championship. Since then, Astoria had a play-in loss to Gladstone in 2012, followed by first round exits in 2013 and 2014.

"It feels amazing (to win a state playoff game)," said senior pitcher Kai Brown. "My freshman year, I remember coming here and watching the Gladstone game, when we got upset. Then my sophomore year we lost to Sisters, and last year at Philomath. This being my senior year — it's a great time to get one."

Brown threw six strong innings to pick up the win, striking out 10 with four walks.

"I felt confident," he said. "And I felt really good about our defense. Honestly, I feel like our defense can outmatch a lot of teams. I know they've always got my back."

In addition to being Brown's first playoff victory, it was the first state playoff win for every single Astoria player, with the exception of Ryan Palek, who won a playoff game with Knappa last season.

"It's been a long time," said Astoria coach Dave Gasser, whose last state playoff win as Fishermen coach came in 2010.

And now — having won 20 of their last 22 — the Fishermen are back to looking like the traditional 4A power they're known for.

Astoria travels to Hidden Valley Friday for a quarterfinal game against the Mustangs, who are 0-2 against the Fishermen in state playoff games.

Wednesday's win looked like most Astoria victories over the last month — the Fishermen played stellar defense, hit the ball well, Brown gave up very little on the mound, and Sambo "Mr. HBP" Tuimato was hit by a pitch for the 11th time this season.

Brown retired the first eight batters in order, and had faced just 13 batters through four innings. He gave up one hit, a single in the sixth inning. Carter Wallace pitched the seventh.

Offensively, Astoria had eight hits, including two each for Kyle Strange, Nick Scott and Cade O'Brien. Astoria's 7, 8 and 9 hitters combined for five hits. Scott and O'Brien both drove in a pair of runs.

"When the bottom of the order is helping you win a playoff game, that's a good sign," Gasser said.

After a scoreless first inning, the Fishermen put up six runs in the second and one in the third for a 7-0 lead, more than enough for Brown.

"Kai was tough — he was pounding the zone and had a one-hitter through six," Gasser said.

The Rangers also committed five errors, including back-to-back miscues to start Astoria's six-run second inning.

The Fishermen, meanwhile, were playing great defense — which could ultimately get them back to Volcanoes Stadium.

"We can hold people," Brown said. "If we can hold teams and score a few runs, we can keep on going."

Gasser stated, "We've given up 82 runs, and that's the fewest in 4A baseball (North Bend has given up the next-fewest, with 97). So the way we pitch and play defense is obviously decent."

"I felt really good coming in," he added. "We've won 20 of our last 22, and that's a pretty good run. And a lot of those wins have been against clubs that are in the playoffs."

"Hidden Valley has been ranked in the Top 5 all year, but I feel good about our chances to beat 'em."



Astoria's Cade O'Brien, No. 4, slides across the plate in the second inning of their baseball game against Estacada Wednesday.

Wednesday's game was also a rare state playoff at Aiken Field.

While Astoria has "officially" had home state playoff games, all of their home playoffs since 2010 (because of weather) have been at Hillsboro or West Linn.

"This is the first time we actually played a home playoff game on our home field since 2009," Gasser said, referring to a May 27, 2009, win over North Marion.

"The last playoff game I coached at Aiken was Jordan Poyer's senior year," he said. "And I'm glad we won today. We've been getting a little better every year."

Knappa 19, Lost River 2

KNAPPA — Same teams, different field, same result.

For the second year in a row, Lost River found itself facing Knappa in a first-round game of the OSAA Class 2A baseball state playoffs.

Which was bad news for the Raiders, who lost a 25-1 decision to the Loggers in last year's first round, in a game played at Broadway Field in Seaside.

This year's game was played at Knappa's Teevin Field, where the Loggers handed the Raiders their now annual pounding, 19-2. Knappa had not played in 12 days, but it made no difference, as the Loggers rapped out 14 hits, with a handful of extra-base hits.

Tyson Bumard had a grand slam in the second inning; Justin Drago had a home run and two triples; and Andy Miller was 4-for-5 at the plate.

Miller started on the mound, where Dale Takalo and Chase Rusinovich also saw action.

Knappa's playoff run continues Friday at home against Dufur.

Softball

Knappa 4, Prospect 1

KNAPPA — The "first-round jinx" is officially over for the Knappa softball program.

After six first round losses over the last six years, the Lady Loggers are finally advancing in the state playoffs.

Kacie Cameron struck out 16 batters and gave up just one hit, and the Loggers collected three hits in a 4-1 win over Prospect/Butte Falls Wednesday at Knappa.

And now all eyes are on the Loggers, who have the most victories at the Class 2A level and own a 23-game win streak. Knappa advances to the quarterfinals, where the Loggers play at Pilot Rock Friday, time to be announced.

A state Player of the Year candidate, Cameron highlighted Wednesday's win with a line drive two-run home run, in addition to her six strong innings in the circle.

Knappa scored two runs each in the fourth and fifth innings, and Prospect scored its lone run in the seventh.

The Loggers lost a nonleague game to Pilot Rock earlier this season, 3-1, although Cameron struck out 13 in the loss.

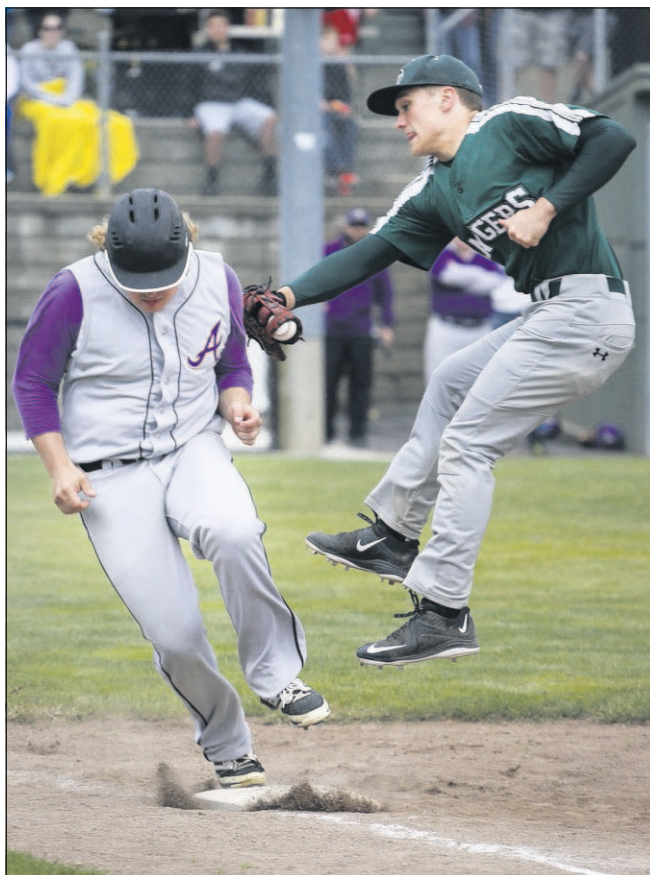
Friday's winner advances to play either Gold Beach or Central in the semifinals Tuesday.



Astoria's Kai Brown, No. 10, pitches in the fifth inning.



Astoria's Nick Scott, No. 13, tries to avoid a tag by Estacada catcher Kodey James in the second inning.



LEFT: Astoria's Ryker Helmersen, No. 1, runs down the third base line in the second inning of the Fishermen's baseball game against Estacada Wednesday. FAR LEFT: Astoria's Carter Wallace, No. 14, beats out a tag by Estacada's Levi Albrecht in the third inning.

Photos by JOSHUA BESSEX
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SCOREBOARD

PREP SCHEDULE

FRIDAY

Baseball — 4A Quarterfinal: Astoria at Hidden Valley, TBA; 2A Quarterfinal: Dufur at Knappa, TBA

Softball — Knappa at Pilot Rock, TBA

BASEBALL

HIGH SCHOOLS

4A State Playoffs
Astoria 11, Estacada 2
Estacada 000 010
1-2 3 5
Astoria 061 310
x-11 8 1
Avants, McDaniel (5) and Gant; Brown, Wallace (7) and Helmersen. W: Brown. L: Avants. RBI: Est, Avalos 2; Ast, O'Brien 2, Scott 2, Wallace, Palek, Fremstad. 2B: Ast, O'Brien. HBP: Est, Hammond; Ast, Tuimato, Fremstad. LOB: Estacada 4, Astoria 5.