

Knappa: Community rallies around Loggers team

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Their win streak stands at 35 in a row — unmatched in Oregon, at any level. (From 2015 to midway through the 2016 season, the Loggers had a 42-game win streak).

“We’re playing good, but I still feel like we haven’t reached our peak,” said Knappa senior Kaleb Miller. “That’s kind of a good thing. We’re playing good baseball and beating teams, but I feel like we can play better.”

Coming off a 16-0 first-round playoff win Wednesday over Riddle, the No. 1-ranked Loggers are playing well enough that it will take a big upset to keep them out of this year’s championship game June 1 at Volcanoes Stadium in Keizer.

‘We know the expectations’

Through it all — the win streaks, the no-hitters, the 10-run wins, the undefeated league seasons, the all-league and MVP awards — the Loggers have worked hard to stay focused.

They have won two state championships in the past three years, with three straight appearances in the title game.

“We’ve been hitting the ball well and playing good defense — I think we’re ready for a run,” said Dale Takalo, one of nine seniors on the roster.

“We (the seniors) know it’s our last run, but we’re definitely not too tight or anything,” he said. “We like to keep it fun and loose, but at the same time, work hard and know what the goal is. We know the expectations.

“Just take it one game at a time,” Takalo said. “We know what we’re capable of and try not to look too far ahead, but we try to win every game we can. It’s worked pretty good for us the last few years.”

Takalo would know. For those Knappa seniors who have played varsity ball since their freshman season, the Loggers have an overall record of 91 wins, five losses.

The seniors, quite simply,



The Knappa Loggers baseball team is poised for another championship run.

Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

‘I was 10 years old then, and I remember that run. I remember going to that championship game, and even watching the teams prior to that. It’s really something special. That team inspired all of us, and now I hope we can inspire the next generation of Knappa baseball players.’

Dale Takalo | Knappa senior

don’t know what it’s like to not play in a state championship game.

The man who keeps the Loggers on the ground is head coach Jeff Miller, who graduated from Knappa High School in 1990.

In his 17th year, his career coaching record is 342-95, with numerous league championships and Coach of the Year awards.

This time of year, he keeps the Loggers from flying too high.

“It’s playoff time,” Miller said. “Like any season, there’s

ups and downs. I think we’ve played well lately. But there’s always stuff to work on, that we’re trying to get better at.”

At the same time, “our kids have been there, they’re experienced, so they know what it takes.”

One thing Miller and Takalo agree on — the Loggers get plenty of support from the home fans and the Knappa community in general.

Logger games aren’t just games, they’re events.

“I know they’ve been really supportive of me and the kids, and we always appreciate



Players on the mound rehearse the pickoff attempt.

that,” Miller said. “Some support by coming to the games and others follow us on the computer, but this community is behind all of their kids. That’s part of what makes it special to live out here.”

‘There’s no place like Knappa’

Kaleb Miller — no relation to the coach — spent his first two years of high school in Pleasant Hill, near Eugene.

Being a Pleasant Hill Bible was fun, but Miller says he was accepted right away in Knappa.

“It’s a really good community,” he says of his new hometown. “Last year was super-cool. It’s a little hard to go to a team that had just been to the state championship, but I was welcomed right away, and seemed to fit in.

“Pleasant Hill is a pretty tight community,” Miller said,

“but they’re not as accepting as here. Everyone is super-nice and positive ... it’s pretty awesome here.”

Everyone knows and supports Dale and the Takalo boys, from raising flags at the Scandinavian Festival to his exploits on the basketball court and the baseball diamond.

The feeling is mutual.

“There’s no place like Knappa that backs up their kids and athletes,” Dale Takalo said. “We always get good crowds and everybody’s supportive. It’s really a community deal, and it’s kind of neat to be the guy people are looking up to. It’s something you have to take serious, and be a good role model.”

Takalo himself was one of the hero worshippers, back when coach Miller was leading the 2010 team to a state championship.

“I was 10 years old then, and I remember that run,” Takalo said. “I remember going to that championship game, and even watching the teams prior to that. It’s really something special. That team inspired all of us, and now I hope we can inspire the next generation of Knappa baseball players.”

Back to this year’s seniors, Miller said, “they’re an amazing group of kids to work with. They’ve been successful in other sports, but you look at what they’ve done in four years of baseball, and it’s incredible. Wherever this year ends, whether it’s (in the playoffs) or with another championship, this group is unprecedented here.”

Says Kaleb Miller, “We all have one goal, and that’s to play four playoff games, and hopefully win the fourth. We’re serious when we need to be, but we’ll enjoy ourselves and have fun when it’s that time.”

Coach Miller adds, “To go to three straight championship games, be a part of an undefeated season, and now part of an undefeated regular season, that’s pretty lofty stuff. And I’m the lucky stiff that gets to watch ‘em play.”

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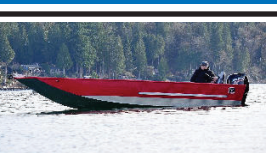
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