

## SPORTS

# Utti, Fresno State close out season

By GARY HENLEY  
The Astorian

If there's one thing Seaside basketball fans know about Maddi Utti: No matter who the opponent, what the score is or whatever physical ailment she might be dealing with, the hard-working forward with the golden touch always gave it everything she had, for four full quarters.

The game took her from a fifth-place finish at state as a freshman in 2014 and third-place as a senior in 2017, to an outstanding Division I basketball career at Fresno State, highlighted by a conference Player of the Year award in 2020.

Unfortunately for Utti and the Bulldogs, Fresno State came up one win short of the NCAA Tournament for the second straight season this year, following a loss last week to Wyoming in the Mountain West Conference championship game.

Fresno State — which entered the conference tournament as the No. 4 seed — got past No. 1 New Mexico the night before, but lost a nail-biter to the Cowgirls in the final, 59-56.

Fittingly, Utti was the only player for either team to play the entire 40 minutes, finishing with a game-high nine rebounds and seven points.

The night before, in a 77-72 victory over New Mexico, Utti contributed 17 points and 12 rebounds.

The Bulldogs lost six conference games in the regular season, but the last four losses came by just a combined seven points. And last Wednesday's defeat fell into the same category.

Four days before the conference tournament began, Utti talked about the close losses.

"There's been a lot of close games, we just haven't been able to finish them out," Utti said. "We know we should have won those games, which



**TOP:** Seaside's Maddi Utti, on her Senior Night at Fresno State with coach Jaime White. **ABOVE:** Utti puts up a shot in her last game of the conference tournament.

would have made us conference champions. That's pretty disappointing, but going into the tournament we know that we're able to win those games."

Win them they did. The first two nights, Fresno State beat Nevada (70-46), then New Mexico.

The loss to Wyoming was a heartbreaker for the Bulldogs, especially for Utti and her four senior teammates.

Arguably the greatest girls basketball player in Clatsop County history, Utti's college

basketball career may or may not be over — that decision will come later.

For now, Utti's latest season came to a close in an empty arena, 1,100 miles from home.

There were no fans allowed at the tournament, held at Thomas & Mack Center in Las Vegas — something Utti was finally getting accustomed to.

"It's definitely weird" not having fans in the arena, she said. "They would have the crowd noise, the audio, but

there was just not as much energy in the gym. I've gotten a little used to it, but I would definitely like the fans back."

For Fresno State's Senior Night, Feb. 27 vs. UNLV, Utti had family members (sort of) in attendance.

"They had our parents up on the big screen, to announce us into the starting lineup," Utti said. "It was definitely way different not having them in the gym, but it was still a special night."

It's also just beginning to hit Utti that her four years at Fresno State could be up.

"It started Senior Night, thinking that game was going to be my last game at the Save Mart Center," she said. But, "I'm not sure it will sink in until it's done."

And even then, there's a chance that Utti could return next season.

"I do have another year of eligibility, but I haven't decided what route I want to take, or if I want to keep playing," said Utti, who has had to deal with shoulder problems on her shooting arm for most of the 2021 season.

The injury happened in one of early games, she said. Utti had to wear a shoulder wrap under her uniform the rest of the season.

"It's just there to make sure it's stable. I haven't had to change much as far as shooting. This year has not been the easiest. With COVID and all the hoops we have to go through just to play ... it's been a little mentally draining."

Throughout it all, Utti always gained strength from the hometown support she received from Seaside.

"Seaside has always been one of my biggest support systems, all the time," said Utti, who is closing in on her degree in business finance. "I see the different posts on Facebook and the articles, so I really appreciate the support throughout my past four years."

# Warrenton volleyball tops Rainier

The Astorian

Not quite ready to give up their defending league champions title, the Warrenton volleyball team took to the road and scored a crucial, four-set win Tuesday night at Rainier, 25-21, 17-25, 25-18, 25-23.

The Warriors (5-1 overall) pulled into a first-place tie with the Columbians in the league standings at 2-1. Four of Warrenton's five remaining matches are at home.

Tuesday's first set was tied at 15-15, when Mia McFadden took over at the service line and served the Warriors to a 23-15 lead. A back row kill by McFadden provided the winning point.

After a loss in the second set, the Warriors jumped out a 7-3 lead behind the serving of Brenna Bemus, and never trailed in Game 3.

Rainier led 9-4 early in the fourth set, but McFadden served Warrenton right back into a 10-9 lead with an ace serve as the go-ahead point.

Rainier rebuilt a 23-19 lead, but McFadden saved the day again, serving the final six points of the match, which included two ace serves.

## Warriors defeat Loggers

Over the weekend, Warrenton and Knappa managed to play their annual



**Hailey Bentley delivers a kill for the Warriors in their victory at Knappa.**

nonleague match, held last Saturday at Knappa.

The two teams made the most of it, with the Warriors scoring a five-set win over the Lady Loggers.

Knappa rallied from a two-set deficit to force the fifth set, with Warrenton escaping with the 25-21, 25-21, 19-25, 16-25, 15-9 victory.

"Hailey Bentley, Ann Heyen and Jaime Annat were fierce at the net," said Warrenton coach Staci Mieth, as the trio combined for 15 block kills, seven blocks and 16 touches.

Avyree Mieth had a strong defensive game with 17 digs and four saves. She also led Warrenton with eight ace serves, while Mia McFadden paced the Warriors with 11 kills, followed by Mieth with 10.

Brenna Bemus was 14-for-14 serving with three aces, and Marlie Annat was 18-of-19. Warrenton only missed 10 serves in five games with 18 aces.

"I knew the games would be tight," said Knappa coach Jeff Kaul. "Playing Warrenton, which usually happens during the first week of the season, is always a time to see how we stack up against a much larger school. I was not disappointed by what I saw."

For the Loggers, Ava Skipper and Taylin Regier were a combined 32-for-35 serving with nine aces.

Skipper added 29 assists and 12 digs, Victoria Ramvick had 15 kills and Hannah Dietrichs finished with 13 kills. In a Northwest League match Tuesday in Rockaway Beach, Knappa swept Neah-Kah-Nie, 25-5, 25-17, 25-16.

Victoria Ramvick led Knappa with 11 kills and three blocks, while Ava Skipper was 21-of-22 serving with six aces.

# Seaside boys soccer defeats Yamhill-Carlton, 7-1

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After having Tuesday's game with Astoria canceled, the Seaside boys soccer team brought in Yamhill-Carlton for a nonleague match, and pounded the Tigers 7-1 at Broadway Field.

The Fishermen are playing a junior varsity-only, or 8-on-8 varsity schedule this season.

Seaside built a 3-0 half-time advantage, and with only 10 players on the field in the second half, still outscored the Tigers 4-1, with three goals from Dodger Holmstedt, and another by Westin Carter.

After two straight losses to start the season (1-0 to Valley Catholic, 7-0 to Stayton), the Gulls have won three straight, outscoring the opposition by a combined 14-1.

Seaside can pull into a first-place tie in the league standings with a win Thursday at Valley Catholic.

The 1-0 loss to the Valiants to start the season "was a pretty good contest, for our first run out," said Seaside coach John Chapman. "We have some young guys out there, and we had one error, and that was all it took."

"We pretty much controlled the Tillamook game

(a 3-0 win)," he said. "Stayton contacted us about adding a game, and as good as they are, that showed some respect that they have for us."

"We lost a starter in the opening minute, so we basically had to play 80 minutes with 10 guys. The score wasn't really indicative of the game."

Always the Cowapa League favorite, Chapman said the Gulls are "going to

graduate another solid era of kids, but we've got plenty of talent coming up."

In the meantime, "our senior cadre of players is doing a great job, with Westin, Luke (Verley), Dodger, Patrick (Chapman), Diego (Angulo-Joli) and Owen (Higdon)," Chapman said. "Riley Wunderlich (a junior) is fearless and solid in goal, so we'll be fine there for next season."

# Astoria girls soccer off to best start in school history

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After a scoreless 40-minute first half, the Astoria girls soccer team scored three goals in the first 15 minutes of the second half, on their way to an easy 3-0 win over Banks in a Cowapa League match Monday night at CMH Field.

For what it's worth in a shortened season, the Lady Fishermen are off to their best start in school history at 4-1, keeping pace with current first place Valley Catholic (5-0) in the league standings, as the only two Cowapa teams with winning records. The two teams meet March 23 at Valley Catholic.

Meanwhile, Astoria allowed just one shot on goal in 80 minutes of action Monday, with 11 shots on goal of their own (eight in the second half).

The first score came 3:50 into the second half, when Astoria's Avery Biederman made a run down the right

sideline and pushed the ball ahead to Elle Espelien.

The Astoria senior carried the ball to the baseline and centered a short pass to Karen Jimenez directly in front of the net for an easy score.

Less than four minutes later, it was Jimenez who sent a pass ahead to Espelien, whose shot from 18 yards out squeezed past the Banks goalkeeper inside the right post.

Espelien scored her second goal in the 54th minute of play, chasing down a pass up the middle from Maddie Sisley and scoring from 10 yards out.

Astoria was set to play Wednesday at Tillamook.

In other Cowapa action Monday, Valley Catholic remained unbeaten by defeating Seaside 3-0 at Broadway Field. The Gulls play Wednesday at Rainier/Clatskanie.

Astoria and Seaside will end the regular season with a Clatsop Clash March 31 at Broadway Field.

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