

Cowapa: ‘Success runs in cycles in most sports’

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Two smaller 5A schools, St. Helens and Scappoose, will move down into the Cowapa League.

The Cowapa is “going to look more like it did 20 years ago,” said Astoria athletic director Howard Rub, as the Fishermen prepare for more road trips along U.S. Highway 30.

“I prefer 30 to 26,” said Rub, on his choice of highways. He added, “(the Banks Braves) have been a great competitor. We have a tremendous amount of respect for everything that’s going on in that little corridor on 26, between Banks and Valley Catholic. They’ve done it well and done it right.”

Also, “I know Scappoose is excited to be back in the Cowapa League,” he said. “There’s a certain level of respect that exists amongst our athletic departments, and that’s what makes it so tough about Banks and Valley Catholic leaving. But the same is true about getting Scappoose and St. Helens back.”

In addition to St. Helens and Scappoose, other schools moving from 5A to 4A next school year include Crook County, North Bend and The Dalles.

Elsewhere, Neah-Kah-Nie — struggling in many sports in the 2A Northwest League — will move up into the 3A Coastal Range League. Due to a lack of numbers, the Pirates did not even field a football team last fall.

Class 3A Clatskanie will move down to replace Neah-Kah-Nie in the 2A Northwest League.

Regardless of who’s coming and going, Astoria boys basketball coach Kevin Goin was hoping the Cowapa would have added more than just two schools. The league will still have five schools: Astoria, St. Helens, Scappoose, Seaside and Tillamook. Milwaukie will join the league in football.

“I’m just disappointed there’s not more teams,” Goin said. “We need to get more schools in our leagues. For (boys basketball), it’s hard to find games. That’s why we do so many tournaments. I’ve had numerous calls with schools from Portland, big and small, to get games. It’s become problematic.”

Goin is “fine with having Scappoose and St. Helens. That part doesn’t bother me. I was just wishing we’d get seven or eight teams in



The Astoria Fishermen and Scappoose Indians, shown here facing off in a 2010 football game, will once again be Cowapa League rivals starting next fall.

ENROLLMENT

In the OSAA’s projected three-year enrollment, St. Helens will be the largest school at 598, followed by Scappoose (501), Tillamook (454), Astoria (398) and Seaside (313).

the league. We play 16 non-league games before we get to league.”

When the OSAA expanded from four to six classifications in 2006, they went one class too many, according to Goin and other coaches.

“Five classes would have been the way to go,” he said. “The problem is you don’t want to be the small fish in a big pond. They moved quite a few down from 5A (to 4A), which I’m fine with. The big issue is that there’s nobody close for us to play.”

So long, Braves

Banks — the perennial champions of Cowapa League football and softball — will now be a problem for the likes of Rainier and Warrenton, as the Braves will call the 3A Coastal Range League their new home for the next four years. Valley Catholic will be in the Lewis & Clark League, all 3A Portland-area private schools.

“I’m torn, for sure,” about leaving the Cowapa League, Banks football coach Cole Linehan said.

Linehan is a graduate of Banks, played football at the University of Oregon, and later coached track at Astoria. His football team finished the 2021 season ranked fourth at the 4A level.

“We’ve had so much success in 4A, and I wanted to stay there,” he said. “We’ve won the league four straight

times, so the idea of leaving — that is tough.”

Since 2018, the Astoria and Seaside football teams are a combined 0-9 against the Braves, which includes Seaside’s loss to Banks in the 2018 state championship game. Astoria defeated Banks in the 2008 state title contest.

“It’s rough that we’re losing Banks,” Rub said. “The Braves have been a big part of the Cowapa League, and have been very strong athletically. They were a great school to have in our league. We’ll miss them.”

When the OSAA went to six classifications in 2006, Banks’ enrollment was at 429. Banks now has a projected three-year enrollment of 269 — well below the 4A range of 311 to 607.

Conference of ex-champions

Sportswise, the Cowapa League may be losing a big part of its “Conference of Champions” label with the departure of Banks and Valley Catholic.

Over the past 10 years, most of the Cowapa League state titles have come from the Braves and the Valiants.

Banks won state championships in baseball (2019), boys basketball (2019), football (2018), softball (2012, 2013, 2016) and volleyball (2015). The Braves also have second-place finishes in football (2019), softball (2010, 2015) and girls basketball (2017).

Valley Catholic has collected state titles in boys cross-country (2014, 2016), girls soccer (2014, 2017), volleyball (2018, 2019), boys golf (2018) and dance (2015, 2016, 2018). The Valiants have second-place finishes in girls soccer (2016, 2018), volleyball (2017) and boys

basketball (2017, 2018).

Although the Cowapa will still have state powers in Astoria girls and Seaside boys basketball and Tillamook wrestling, the absence of Banks and Valley Catholic will leave some big holes atop the league standings in certain sports, such as boys and girls soccer, both won last year by Valley Catholic at a combined 18-0.

At the same time, the league should remain competitive in football. Scappoose was a 5A state playoff contender last fall. Both the Indians and Lions also usually have strong numbers in track and cross-country.

“We have been very competitive racing against the St. Helens and Scappoose teams in the past,” said Astoria cross-country coach Andrew Fick, “and I think we will continue to be competitive with them moving forward. There is a good amount of camaraderie between runners and coaches at different schools as well, and I’m confident that even with the changes, that culture of both friendship and competition will continue.”

As Rub and Goin both say, success runs in cycles in most sports.

“All of that stuff is cyclical,” Goin said. “Banks only went to the state tournament once for a long amount of time, until recently. You get a run of kids and you’re going to be good. I don’t blame them or Valley for switching to 3A. You don’t want to be the smallest.”

In the Cowapa League, that distinction will now belong to Seaside. In the OSAA’s projected three-year enrollment, St. Helens will be the largest school at 598, followed by Scappoose (501), Tillamook (454), Astoria (398) and Seaside (313).

Hall: ‘We had some rough times, but he kept his sense of humor. He was always so steady’

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like e-books. Public schools encourage students to sign up and draw on what’s available. “There has been an increase in the range of stuff that we can get at the library, and it is at no additional cost,” he said.

The library system weathered the 2008 recession. In late spring 2019, the library system was addressing more budget problems. Amid rumors of potential branch closures, Hall was guest speaker at the Friends of the Ilwaco and Ocean Park Libraries annual meeting. He was resolute in assuring peninsula patrons that none of the three area libraries were being targeted for closure, despite their apparent proximity to each other.

Cheryl Heywood was hired as executive director of Timberland in 2013. She said Hall’s leadership was crucial as the network addressed budget restrictions and found ways to cut staff from 310 to 265. This included a reduction in senior administrators from eight positions to four as managers who left were not replaced.

“We wanted to balance the budget and continue to give citizens the best services, but with very tight constraints,” Heywood said. “(Hall) had a steadying presence and perspective of the role of the trustees. He steered the ship to calmer waters.”

‘Wisdom’ to the table

Hall recalled the attempt of the agency to have its board meet at all of the library locations meant significant regional travel. In the COVID era, after briefly closing branches and putting most services on hold when pandemic restrictions started in March 2020, the system found creative ways to serve patrons with contactless book pickup services. Programs that would have taken place in person, like author talks and some children’s enrichment projects, shifted to online platforms like Zoom.

As president in his final year, Hall convened his final monthly board meeting on Zoom just before Christmas. After the business was completed, board mem-

bers pitched in with tributes. Brian Zylstra, who has represented Lewis County since 2016, commended Hall’s leadership. “You have been a steady hand with the board over these years and shown a lot of wisdom,” he said.

Hall reminded those faces present on the computer screen that he hadn’t actually met three of his five board colleagues in person — Jasmine Dickhoff, from Grays Harbor; Kenneth Sebby, of Mason County; and Nicolette Oliver, from Thurston County. “I have big shoes to fill, and I just hope I can do my best in the new year, but I will miss your presence and your guidance,” said Oliver, who will succeed him as board president.

Regional orientation

Corby Vaness served nine years on the board representing Grays Harbor County, all with Hall, retiring in 2020.

The period coincided with ongoing budget worries and the departure of an executive director. “He has a very funny dry wit,” she said. “We had some rough times, but he kept his sense of humor. He was always so steady.”

She said one important element was embracing the five-county concept. “Even though he represented Pacific County, he would look beyond local issues. That’s the key to a board like this,” she said. “When someone wants to talk about just their county, it does not work.”

Zylstra echoed that, noting that Hall always asked good questions. “He cared about Timberland and its patrons throughout the library district,” he said.

Hall’s community service hasn’t just been on the library board. He served three decades on the South Bend City Council, continues on a north county board that coordinates ambulance contracts between towns, and spent 14 years as a volunteer collecting fees and enforcing rules at the South Bend boat ramp.

Vaness said this illustrated his approach. “His life in general,” she said, when asked about his impact. “Being of service to his community runs through his veins.”

Firehouse: Volume of calls has increased over the years

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and tsunamis.

City staff say the firehouse is not practical to retrofit and it makes no fiscal sense to spend up to \$10 million on a facility subject to inundation. An August cost estimate put the price of a new Highlands station at just over \$13 million.

“With this bond we hope to keep Gearhart and its citizens on track to being highly resilient, healthy and happy,” Lair said.

The volume of calls for service since 2015 has

increased 60%, with 660 calls for service in 2021.

“If we continue on this path five years from now we are projected to have nearly 1,000 calls yearly,” Lair said. “We need facilities to support that high demand.”

Hopes for a bond vote last November were delayed by a legal challenge that proved unsuccessful in court. City officials intend to put the bond measure on the May ballot, with public meetings throughout the coming months.

In 2021, the fire depart-

ment, which has 30 volunteers, had less than half the amount of volunteer hours compared to 2020, Fire Chief Josh Como said. “With everything being busier, the response load is falling on fewer and fewer key members. We have a super strong, very dedicated core group that keeps responding,” he said. “This is not just relevant in Gearhart but a countywide situation.”

The loss of volunteers is a challenge for many fire departments.

“It’s a nationwide issue now,” City Attorney Peter

Watts said. “Recruitment and retention really have been negatively impacted in the last few decades. That’s

not something that anyone in Clatsop County is doing wrong — in fact Clatsop County is doing really well

compared to a lot of other places that are having to go with a professional fire force instead of volunteers.”

McMansions: Several questions remain

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feet, according to Clatsop County records. Since 2000, the average has increased to over 2,250 square feet.

“I think we have to kind of think about where we want to limit the size of houses here and what we want the village to look like,” McCarthy said. “We’ve had a few houses built here that did

take advantage, I think, of some of the loopholes. And I think that’s one of the reasons that we’re looking at the size of houses so that we don’t start getting some of these big box-like houses that just don’t fit the village character that we’re looking at.”

However, she said, there are still several questions that need to be worked out before

a decision is made. How large is too large? How small is too small? How much does a family with three children really need?

“I have a feeling once we start making decisions, it may be that places like Gearhart and Seaside and Manzanita maybe might take a look at what we’re doing and want to do something similar,” McCarthy said.

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