

CRC Basketball

League strong beneath Bulldog shadow

Buckaroos, Eagles also among state's Top 10 teams

By ERIK SKOPIL
East Oregonian

Only The Dalles have downed Hermiston in four seasons of Columbia River Conference action. That triumph came by way of a 49-38 Riverhawk victory in the 2013 CRC opener. Since then the Bulldogs have rattled off 17 consecutive league victories. Only five of those wins have come by margins of 10 points or less. While the Bulldogs (12-3) have elevated their game this season — leading to Class 5A's top ranking — the remainder of the league appears to have followed suit. Entering tonight's slate of league openers, northeastern Oregon's premier basketball league lays claim to three of the state's top nine OSAA Class 5A girls basketball teams.

The seventh-ranked Buckaroos (10-5) matched Hermiston point-for-point in 15 non-league games, equaling the Bulldogs 52.3 point per game average. The scoring output has each school fourth in state in scoring. Unlike the Bulldogs, whose offense is highly concentrated between guards Jansen Edmiston and Sara Ramirez, Pendleton is a points by committee operation. Five different players have led the team in scoring in games this year and no player averages more than 6-foot-2 center Kristin Williams' 10.2 points per game. Marlene Bodmer is the only other Buck in double-figures with 10.1, and four other players average more than four points per contest. The main distinguishing factor between Hermiston and Pendleton has been on the other end of the floor. Pendleton allows an average of six points more per game — the worst number in the league. They've been blitzed for 52 points or more in each of their five losses this season. Senior point guard Darian Lindsay has reassummed her role as the league's top distributor and also its biggest pest. Lindsay averages 3.9 assists per game, but her 3.9 steals are just as integral to the Buckaroos success.



The Pendleton girls basketball team poses with its plaque for placing eighth at the Nike Interstate Shootout, a four-day tournament held in Lake Oswego. Pendleton has leapt to a No. 7 state ranking. The Dalles aren't far behind at ninth in Class 5A.

2013-14 CRC Final Standings

Hermiston	9-0		
The Dalles	5-4		
Pendleton	4-5		
Hood River	0-9		
2014-15	Record	PF	PA
Hermiston	12-3	52.3	41.7
Pendleton	10-5	52.3	47.9
The Dalles	8-6	41.8	42.5
Hood River	5-10	37.5	44.7

Williams has carried over her volleyball season prowess with strong run on the hardcourt. Williams averages 3.1 blocks per game. Kiana Sperl averages just 5.4 points per contest, but snags 9.8 rebounds an outing. Bodmer and Lindsay make up two of four All-CRC returners. The Buckaroos top win to date came over No.6 Springfield on the Miller's home court earlier this month. Senior center Olivia Starks is the remaining member of The Dalles (8-6) 1-2 punch from last year's state tournament participant. Last year's CRC Player of the Year Emily Bailey graduated, but Starks and the ninth-ranked Eagles have managed to remain among the state's top teams due to their defense. The 6-foot-2 Starks anchors the paint for a team that has allowed just

50 points in a contest three times this season. Sophomore guard Iliana Telles has emerged in her second year of varsity. Telles was a second-team All-League selection a year ago. The Eagles held Sandy's third-ranked scoring offense 10 points below their average in a win earlier in December. They also handed eighth-ranked Summit its third loss of the season. Hood River Valley (5-10) is improved from a season ago and appear capable of snagging a league win for the first time since 2012. Senior guard Kelsey Wells averages a team-best 10.8 points per game. Jetsena Mattson was an All-CRC second team selection last season for the Riverhawks. The Riverhawks have beaten three Class 6A teams this season. However, the clubs own a combined 10-33 record. Tonight's CRC-opening action begins with Hermiston hosting The Dalles and Hood River Valley hosting Pendleton. Both games are set for 7 p.m. starts. Only one team will earn and automatic state playoff bid from the CRC this season, but the No. 2 and 3 finishers will still get the chance to make the final 16-team bracket via the play-in round.

BULLDOGS: Support web replaces individual leadership for Bulldogs

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again," her backcourt-mate Sara Ramirez added. Three days following the loss, the Dawgs skirted that emotion, defeating OSAA Class 5A top-ranked La Salle Prep 61-57 in overtime. The win might've cemented that the Bulldogs won't taste defeat again this regular season. Now the state's top dog themselves, the Bulldogs enters Columbia River Conference play tonight at home against The Dalles. Since the league's formation in 2010, the conference has belonged to Hermiston. They've pieced together three perfect seasons in four tries and have won 41 of 42 games against conference foes. There's no question where the target lies in the CRC, Hoffert said, it's squarely on Hermiston's back. Add in the state's top-billing, and the rivalries become even more contentious. "There probably is more fuel for (opponents) because we are No. 1 (in state) and they're tired of losing. 'Now they're No. 1 and we hate them even more'," Hoffert said. Ramirez doesn't believe that is a bad thing. "I mean we're proud, but we shouldn't feel any pressure," she said of the No. 1 ranking. That confidence hears back to the Sunnyside loss, Hoffert said. During a timeout after they'd squandered their lead, he saw something uncharacteristic. "I was pulling girls into the huddle Tuesday night," he said. "I've never had to do that, where you have a couple of girls walking around not listening and you have to pull them in. That wasn't the case on Friday (versus La Salle Prep). "There was a lot of

support. It probably made a huge difference in the outcome, just because you could tell they felt like they were supported by each other if something wasn't going well." Things didn't go well. Behind late game heroics by La Salle Prep's Tori Goodman, the Falcons forced overtime. Instead of faltering against an unbeaten for the second time in the week, the Bulldogs buckled down and made key stops to earn the marquee victory. The support web is necessary, Hoffert said, especially since the quad lacks an individual, vocal leadership. "We know how to get on each other so we don't get mad," Edmiston said. "We're really supportive of each other and we know when we do things bad, so we don't have to gripe at each other." That leadership mostly manifests itself on the court. Hoffert sees Ramirez' hustle and grinding style as the central cog. Edmiston and fellow starters Kynzee Padilla, Abi Drotzmann and Maddy Juul feed off her energy. "It's kind of follow by example," Hoffert said. "The contagiousness is because of the way you play. Girls get excited and work hard and then all of a sudden they make a great play and now they're cheering." If they follow their leader's words, little doubt is left on what the Bulldogs expect to accomplish in CRC play. "I just want to beat these teams by a lot," Ramirez said. Hermiston hosts the Riverhawks at 7 p.m. tonight.

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