

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 2016

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Sports shorts

NCAA to allow Big 12 title game

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — The Big 12 will be allowed to hold a football championship game in the future if it wants to under a rule change approved at the NCAA's annual convention.



The change scraps the requirement that leagues have 12 members and play in two divisions in order to hold a title game. The new rule lets a smaller league play a title game pitting its top two teams, provided it plays a round-robin regular season schedule as the Big 12 does now.

The vote by the NCAA Division I Council passed 7-2 on Wednesday. The Atlantic Coast Conference and the American Athletic Conference voted against it and the Pac-12 didn't vote.

The 10-member Big 12 is the only major conference that doesn't play a football title game.

Ex-NFL player Phillips found dead in prison

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California prison officials say former NFL running back Lawrence Phillips has been found dead in his prison cell, and they suspect suicide.

Officials say guards at Kern Valley State Prison found the 40-year-old Phillips unresponsive in his cell shortly after midnight Wednesday. He was pronounced dead about 1:30 a.m.

He had been in segregation since April 2013 after he was suspected of killing his cellmate.

A Kern County judge had ruled Tuesday that there was enough evidence to try Phillips in the death of 37-year-old Damion Soward.

Phillips played for the St. Louis Rams before being released in 1997. He also played for the Miami Dolphins and San Francisco 49ers.

"It's just crazy when I look back, and literally less than six months ago I had no idea what was going to happen after the Monday night games."

— **Jessica Mendoza**
ESPN broadcaster and former professional softball player who was named as part of the new 'Sunday Night Baseball' broadcast team. ESPN announced on Tuesday that Mendoza and Aaron Boone would replace Curt Schilling and John Kruk in the booth. Mendoza was an analyst on two Monday night games on ESPN in August, before filling in on 'SNB' for the rest of the season after Schilling was suspended from the network.

THIS DATE IN SPORTS

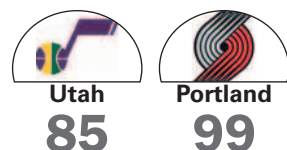
1968 — The Green Bay Packers win their second straight Super Bowl. The game draws the first \$3 million gate in football history. Bart Starr, the game's MVP, completes 13 of 24 passes for 202-yards.

Contact us at 541-966-0838 or sports@eastoregonian.com

NBA

Blazers continue upswing

Lillard scores 21, Portland downs Utah



By ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

PORTLAND — Damian Lillard had 21 points and 10 assists, and the Portland Trail Blazers shook off a slow first half to beat the Utah Jazz 99-85 on Wednesday night.

CJ McCollum added 15 points and eight assists for

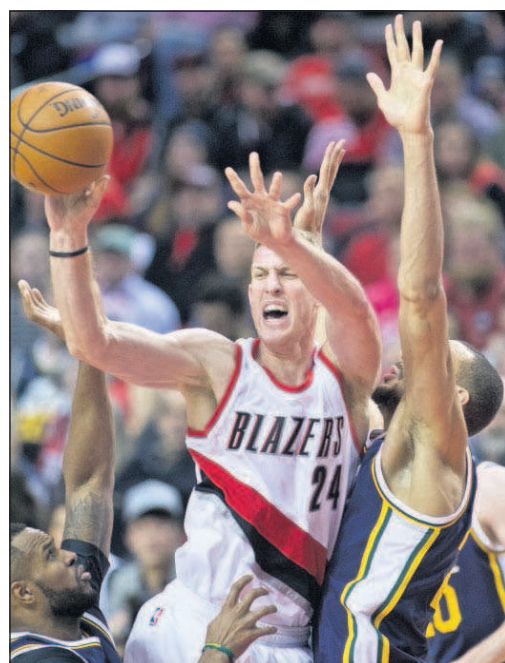
the Blazers, who led by as many as 20 in the second half after the teams traded the lead in the first. It was Portland's second consecutive victory following a three-game losing streak.

Gordon Hayward had 19 points for Utah, which had won two straight. The Jazz, who were coming

off an 86-74 victory over the Lakers in Los Angeles, have not strung together three consecutive wins this season.

Jazz center Rudy Gobert, playing in his fourth game since missing 18 with a sprained left knee, had three points and eight rebounds. But Utah remained without Derrick Favors, who missed his 11th game because of a sore back. He was listed as questionable before the game.

See BLAZERS/2B



Portland Trail Blazers center Mason Plumlee, center, passes away from Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert, right, and forward Trevor Booker, left, during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Portland Wednesday.

AP Photo/Craig Mitchell/lyer

HERMISTON

Neal goes from 1A to FCS



In this Oct. 2, 2015 file photo, Hermiston's Tre Neal sacks Coeur d'Alene sophomore quarterback Colson Yankoff during a football game at Kennison Stadium in Hermiston. Neal has signed with Eastern Washington University to continue a playing career that started in Ione.

Two-time CRC Defensive Player of the Year commits to Eastern Washington

By SAM BARBEE
East Oregonian

Before his junior season, Tre Neal was contemplating a transfer.

The 6-foot-3 defensive lineman, then listed at 215 pounds, decided that if he wanted a better shot at continuing his football career, a better education, and "a better challenge," as he put it, then he would have to go to a bigger school.

He transferred to Hermiston, where he quickly gained 15 pounds of muscle, was named the Columbia River Conference Defensive Player of the Year, and after a senior season — now weighing 250 pounds — that saw him repeat as CRC DPOY and a first-team all-state selection, Neal has committed to play football at Eastern Washington in Cheney, Washington.

"For Tre it was the best move he ever made," former Ione football and basketball coach, current Hermiston assistant coach and longtime mentor of Neal Dennis Stefani said. "He blossomed big time. There really weren't any weight programs at Ione ... He was a big kid already but it helped him a ton and helped him flourish and helped his speed and everything."

"I honestly ... when I first started playing football I didn't expect to make it this far,"

"When I first started playing football I didn't expect to make it this far," Neal said. "I was playing to play. I enjoyed it, and I still do. It was a fun trip."

— **Tre Neal**,
Hermiston senior

See NEAL/2B

HERMISTON

Former Bulldog wrestler tearing it up at Nebraska

Three locals also in action for Oregon State

East Oregonian

LINCOLN, Neb. — Four-time OSAA state champion wrestler Tyler Berger is proving to be an integral part of the success coming to No. 9 Nebraska this season and enters the weekend ranked No. 17 in the nation at 157 pounds.

The redshirt freshman, who won three of his OSAA titles as a Hermiston Bulldog, picked up his 17th win of the season on Sunday with a 3-2 win over Brandon King-sley of No. 23 Minnesota.

Berger's 17 wins ties him for third among Cornhuskers and he's posted a 17-4 overall record while going 8-2 in duals and outscoring those opponents 25-9.

He's won twice by pinfall, his quickest in 1:04, once by technical fall and twice by major decision.

He defeated former Hermiston teammate Abraham Rodriguez of Oregon State to



Berger

help the Huskers sweep their three opponents at the Northeast Duals back in November, 2015.

He also placed seventh at the Midlands Championships in December going 5-2.

Nebraska wrestles at Penn State on Friday and at Ohio State on

Sunday. Rodriguez's Oregon State Beavers moved back into the Top 25 ranking this week with a 26-9 win over No. 16 Central Michigan on Sunday, but neither of the former Bulldogs in action were able to come on top of their matches.

Rodriguez (8-10) lost by decision 7-1 while Joey Delgado (15-7) dropped his 149-pound match 8-3.

Riverside's Hans Rockwell is 1-6 this season with Beavers, but has only competed in tournaments.

Next up for No. 23 Oregon State is a home dual against Wyoming on Saturday.

Camp to coach four Mountaineers one last time in all-star game

By SETH DAHLE
EOU Sports Information

LA GRANDE — A quartet of senior student-athletes on the Eastern Oregon University football team will get a chance to showcase their skills under the direction of head coach Tim Camp at the 21st Annual USA College Football Bowl.

Camp announced on Wednesday morning that All-American wide receiver Jace Billingsley, defensive back Byron Benson, defensive back Adam Bese and linebacker Kristopher Welch will compete inside the confines of Ted Wright Stadium in Savannah, Ga., amongst other seniors who had been recognized as 2015 Preseason All-Americans by USA College Football at NCAA, Division II, Division III, and NAIA programs, as well as those who have earned USA College Football Player of the Week honors.

In addition, Camp will be the head coach for the Admirals and will direct the four Mountaineers on the gridiron one last time. He is just two wins away from tallying the most victories by an EOU head coach in program history.

The bowl game will be part of a five-day, four-night 2016 MLK Holiday Football Festival that includes the inaugural USA High School Football Bowl.

Kickoff is set for Jan. 18 at 2 p.m.

