

# EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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## YOUTH FOOTBALL

# 'A natural progression'

Rookie Tackle aims to make football safer, more fun for youth

By ERIC SINGER  
East Oregonian

Greg Grant felt it was time for a new perspective.

As a member of the OSAA's Football Ad Hoc Advisory committee, Grant, the long-time head football coach at Heppner High School, took part in ongoing discussions happening between the several experienced coaches on the committee on ways to make the game safer and more enjoyable at the youth level.

"It became really evident that there needed to be a better to introduce kids to tackle football," Grant said recently.

The discussion soon centered around Rookie Tackle, a relatively new initiative from USA Football that aims to bridge the gap between flag football and full-fledged 11-person tackle football at the youth level, similarly to the way baseball goes from T-Ball to coach pitch and then to player pitch. The Tualatin Valley Youth Football League, which covers the Tualatin Valley and Portland metro areas and includes more than 6,500 players, were part of the 2017 Pilot Program for Rookie Tackle. Seventeen teams playing Rookie Tackle and the feedback was positive.

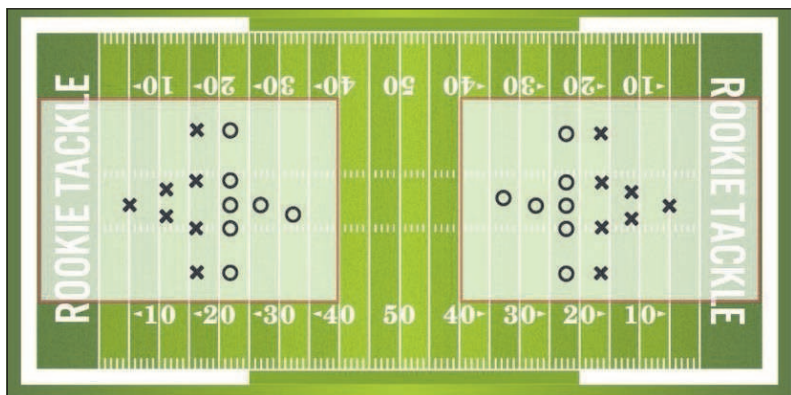
Grant decided to research it further with the possibility of bringing it to Heppner this fall. Unlike most youth leagues, Heppner has not started tackle football until fifth grade, but even then Grant said he and the youth coaches sometimes thought it was still too early.

"We always struggled with making sure kids didn't sour early with tackling," Grant said. "And when I saw this (Rookie Tackle), it's just like a natural progression. Plus I also felt like it's time to look at things a little bit differently ...



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Pendleton Gold and Athena, teams comprised of kids grade 5-6, play in Pendleton Youth Football's 2017 Requa Bowl on Nov. 2.



Courtesy of USA Football

From the 2017 Pilot Program, Rookie Tackle splits a regulation-sized football field in half into two 40-yard-by-35-yard fields to better suit athlete's age and skill level.

because it's not all about teaching kids to hit each other hard."

Grant pitched Rookie Tackle to his youth coaches and the group liked the idea. So starting this fall, Heppner will keep its flag football program in place for grades 3-4, implement Rookie Tackle for grades 5-6 and then will implement 11-man tackle football beginning in seventh grade.

Here is an overview some of the key components of Rookie Tackle:

- Smaller field: Rather than playing on the full regulation-sized 100-yard-by-55-yard football field, the field is split into two 40-yard-

by-35-yard fields, with a gap in the middle for the coaches to watch the action.

- Smaller rosters: Teams will be comprised of six, seven or eight players on each side and the players will play multiple positions on the field during the game and will not be limited to only one position. The smaller rosters and position rotation maximizes space on the field and allows for more playing time and skill development on the sidelines.

See FOOTBALL/3B

## LeBlanc shuts down White Sox

Mariners start second half with 3-1 win

By DOUG MILLER  
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Wade LeBlanc and two relievers combined on a five-hitter, and the Seattle Mariners beat the Chicago White Sox 3-1 on Friday night.

LeBlanc (6-1) gave the Mariners 7 1/3 strong innings in the team's first game after the All-Star break. LeBlanc surrendered two hits in the first, including Daniel Palka's RBI double to center field, but gave up only two hits and a walk in his next 6 1/3 innings. He finished with a season-high 10 strikeouts.

Seattle answered Chicago's early run in the bottom of the first. Dee Gordon, who went 4 for 4, singled to lead off the game against White Sox right-hander James Shields (4-11) and scored on Nelson Cruz's sacrifice fly.

The Mariners took the lead in the fourth. Kyle Seager hit a one-out, ground-rule double and advanced



AP Photo/Ted S. Warren

Seattle Mariners starting pitcher Wade LeBlanc throws to a Chicago White Sox batter during the first inning.

to third on Denard Span's single. Ryon Healy followed with a hard grounder that bounced off third baseman Yolmer Sanchez's glove, allowing Seager to score on the fielder's choice.

Reliever Alex Colome finished

off a scoreless eighth, and Cruz singled in a run in the bottom of that inning to give Seattle a two-run lead. Mariners closer Edwin Diaz, pitching for the first time

See MARINERS/3B

## Legion baseball

# La Grande tops Hodgen Distributing with walk-off

East Oregonian

Hodgen Distributing suffered its first loss of the La Grande tournament on Friday afternoon as it fell 4-3 to the host La Grande on a walk-off single in eight innings.

Hodgen Distributing ( ) was held scoreless until the top of the seventh inning, where it trailed 3-0 and down to the final three outs. Tanner Sweek and Cooper Roberts led off the frame with back-to-back singles and Kyle Field was hit by a pitch, which loaded the bases with no outs. Sweek would score on a passed ball, and three pitches later Ryan Stahl came through with a two-run single to left field that tied the game at 3-3.

But in the bottom of the eighth, La Grande got something going against Hodgen's pitcher, Field, as a leadoff single, a hit batter and a sacrifice bunt put the winning run on third base with only one out. Field couldn't hold the

La Grande offense any longer, as two batters later a La Grande batter singled to the right side of the field, scoring the winning run for a walk-off.

The game was a pitcher's duel between Hodgen Distributing's Matt Demianew and La Grande's Gus Ramsdan. Demianew threw six innings and struck out seven while allowing only six hits, three runs and one walk. Ramsdan went seven innings and struck out six, giving up four hits and three runs.

Aside from Sweek, Roberts and Stahl, Ty Beers was the only other Hodgen hitter to record a hit in the game, which was a one-out single in the first inning.

Hodgen Distributing will wrap up the tournament on Saturday.

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(H) M. Demianew, K. Field (7). (L) Ramsdan, Rogers (8).

See LEGION/3B

## Sports shorts

### Cards' Carpenter hits 3 HRs, 2 doubles in 6 innings

CHICAGO (AP) — Matt Carpenter hit three home runs and two doubles in just six innings for the St. Louis Cardinals, then was pulled from the game against the Chicago Cubs.

Carpenter went 5 for 5 and drove in seven runs at Wrigley Field on Friday before exiting with the Cardinals leading 15-1.

The St. Louis leadoff man has homered in four straight games. During that stretch, he is 9 for 16 with six home runs, three doubles and 10 RBIs.

### Kyle Busch wins the pole at New Hampshire

LOUDON, N.H. (AP) — Kurt Busch has turned a lap of 133.591 mph in the No. 41 Ford to win the pole for the NASCAR race at New Hampshire Motor Speedway this weekend.

The 2004 series champion hasn't won a race since the 2017 Daytona 500 and has just three top-five finishes this season for Stewart-Haas Racing.

Martin Truex Jr., who won last week at Kentucky, will start

second in Sunday's race and Kyle Busch third. Chevrolets and Fords took eight of the top-10 qualifying spots Friday.

Kevin Harvick starts 14th. Truex, Busch and Harvick have 14 of this season's 19 victories. Harvick and Busch each have five wins, Truex has four and the 16-spot playoff field is set to have more drivers qualify on points than through the automatic gate berths that come with a win.



AP Photo/Mary Schwalm

## THIS DATE IN SPORTS

1968 — Arnold Palmer becomes the first PGA golfer to earn \$1 million over his career.

1985 — John Henry, the greatest money winner in horse racing history, is retired. The 10-year-old won 39 races in 83 starts and earned \$6,597,947 in total purses.

1989 — Mike Tyson knocks down Carl "The Truth" Williams in 93 seconds into the first round of his heavyweight title defense. It is the fifth shortest heavyweight title fight in history.

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