

Raised in the Dawg House

Basketball brought Hermiston's six seniors together. The game has made them family.

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

"To be a team, you must be a family."
— Northern State basketball coach Don Meyer

The Hermiston boys basketball team likely has never heard of the late Don Meyer, but it is practicing what he preached. The six seniors on the Hermiston roster have grown up playing basketball together — three of them since the second grade.

They are brothers in a sense. They argue, tease, disagree over the silliest things and drive their coach crazy, but that's what makes them who they are.

"They stick together when times are tough," Hermiston coach Casey Arstein said. "They know each other's role. They know who the shooters are, who the scorers are and they have good chemistry on and off the court. They drive me crazy at times, but I love them all."

The group of Ryne Andreason, Andrew James, Cole Smith, Cesar Ortiz, Adrian Mendez and Jordan Ramirez have helped the Bulldogs (14-6) secure the No. 1 seed in the 3A portion of the MCC/GSL District 8 tournament. They will host Kennewick at 7 p.m. Friday.

"They have spent a lot of time in the game," Arstein said. "They have a high basketball IQ, and that time on the court helps when you play teams bigger than you. They all bring something different to the game. That is a good thing. When times get tough, they know how to turn it on."

In the beginning

Andreason and James started playing basketball together through the Hermiston Parks and Rec Department in the first grade.

In the second grade, they



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Hermiston seniors Ryne Andreason, Adrian Mendez, Andrew James, Jordan Ramirez, Cole Smith and Cesar Ortiz have been playing basketball together on the same team for the past six years.

joined an AAU team coached by current Hermiston athletic director Larry Usher. It's on that team they met Smith.

Fast forward to the sixth grade, that's when Mendez joined the team.

"I got in trouble in the sixth grade and had to see Mr. Usher," Mendez said. "He asked if I wanted to play. I had never played basketball before."

But he was tall (at the time), something the team had lacked



Photo courtesy of Larry Usher

Three of the Hermiston seniors were in the fourth grade when they played on this Hermiston AAU team. Front row (from left): Thomas Mabbott, DJ Usher and Zane Davis. Middle row: Andrew James, Ryne Andreason, Andrew Earl, Cole Smith and Mathew Eckhardt. Back row: coaches Larry Usher and David James.

See Hoops, Page B2

Signing day celebrations for Bucks football

Six players sign letters to play for Oregon universities

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

The Pendleton football team put the school on the map this fall, and the journey continued Wednesday when six players signed letters of intent to play college football.

Shawn Yeager, Everett Willard and Wille Camp all signed to play at Eastern Oregon University, while Blake Davis, Ian Bannister and Aiden Patterson all are headed to Western Oregon University.

EOU coach Tim Camp announced Wednesday that 24 players signed with the Mountaineers. The three Pendleton athletes also will be joined by Hermiston quarterback Andrew James.

"This class is very talented," coach Camp said in a news release. "Each one of these men brings a different strength to the table as both a student and athlete. The key with this class is not going to be their talent, but how they mature and develop as people, students and players over the next two to five years."

The Bucks (10-2) reached the state semifinals for the first time since 1977, and had four players earn first team all-state honors.

Camp is quite familiar with the Pendleton trio — his son Willie will join his program.

"It will be an amazing experience to play for him," Willie Camp said. "He is one of my biggest critics, but he will make me a good player. I have never played for my dad, he's always been a college coach."

Willie Camp said the choice to play at EOU was an easy one, and he's happy to have a couple of his Buckaroo teammates

along for the ride.

"To continue playing with kids I have played with will be amazing," he said. "We have chemistry. I joined them as a junior and they accepted me. We didn't win a state title, but we left a footprint on the program."

Camp was a first team all-league cornerback, and earned all-state honorable mention honors.

Willard, who had a handful of offers to choose from, said there were many things that put EOU at the top of the list.

"I like the coaches, the way they handled the recruiting process, and it's close to home," Willard said. "I'm beyond grateful for everything we have done this season. At times it can be overwhelming, but it's a blessing."

Willard was a first team all-league center and defensive lineman, and earned first team all-state honors on the offensive line, and honorable mention honors as a D-lineman.

"I'd like to play on the offensive line at Eastern," he said. "I'd play anywhere they wanted me to, but I'd prefer guard or center."

Yeager, who was a first-team all-league defensive back for the Bucks, said EOU was his first choice among his offers.

"It's close to home so my mom can come watch me play," he said. "I like their program, and they have a nice weight room. Coach Camp really cares about his players, and he's going to push us. I'm looking forward to it."

While Yeager played on both sides of the ball at Pendleton, he's not sure what the Mounties have in store for him.

"I will play where they tell me," Yeager said.

While the Camps have ties at EOU, Pendleton coach Erik Davis has strong ties

See Bucks, Page B2



Staff photo by Brett Kane

Pendleton football players (from left) Ian Bannister, Blake Davis, Aiden Patterson, Shawn Yeager, Willie Camp and Everett Willard signed letters of intent Wednesday to play college football at Western Oregon University and Eastern Oregon University.

Oregon's recruiting class tops Pac-12

By ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

The traditional signing day Wednesday merely padded Oregon's already stellar recruiting class, the best in school history.

The major ranking services all had Oregon's class in the top 10 nationally, which also put the Ducks atop the Pac-12 Conference.

Oregon got commitments from 21 prospects when the early signing period opened in December. Among them was five-star defensive end Kayvon Thibodeaux, who was ESPN's top overall prospect and the highest-ranked signee ever for the school.

The Ducks added three more recruits

Wednesday, including defensive tackle Kristian Williams, a four-star prospect out of Memphis, Tennessee, who announced on Twitter last weekend that he had decommitted from Minnesota.

Oregon also added Jamal Hill, a safety from Morrow High School in Georgia, and cornerback DJ James from Spanish Fort High School in Mobile, Alabama.

"You think that a second signing day is a little anticlimactic, but it's not. It ended up being a really good start to the day. We were able to land the exact prospect we wanted at the exact position that we needed. So for us it's been an extremely exciting and satisfying morning," coach Mario Cristobal said.