

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

TUESDAY, JULY 2, 2019

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GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Idaho cowgirl
Nikki Albisu
returns to
Pendleton to race
the Green Mile

By **BRETT KANE**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — For most barrel racers, the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds present a challenge. Some fear it, while others welcome the challenge.

The historic rodeo arena is one of the very few that's covered in grass, which can significantly slow down competing horses, even causing them to stumble.

But for Caldwell, Idaho, cowgirl Nikki Albisu, that infamous stadium is exciting, for a number of reasons.

"They're historic grounds with a historic rodeo," said Albisu, 48. "While it is infamous, where else can you run a pattern on grass? It's exhilarating."

Albisu, along with upward of 160 other cowgirls, ran the Green Mile Barrel Race on the Round-Up Grounds on Saturday and Sunday. The event was open to anyone who wanted to ride. Competitors flocked from all over Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana.

"That's the nice thing about it," Albisu said. "You don't have to be a professional to ride here. These are people who just like to go to little jackpots and ride. A lot of cowgirls have this on their bucket list."

While most racers rode one or two horses on Saturday's time-only events, Albisu brought three — Blue Ice Shaken, Seven Vision, and Lo Rider. She also brought along Scorcher, a 4-year-old horse, in order to acclimate him to the greenery for future competitions.

"I want to get them used to everything," she said. "This pattern, the grass, the announcing — all of it."

She has a grand total of five barrel-racing horses on her ranch back in Caldwell, where she and her mother Linda Whitford raise and train them.

"I love the training," Albisu said. "Some people don't have those skills. It wouldn't be the same to go out and buy your own trained horse. I love being around all of this. I love every part of it."

And it doesn't end there — Albisu's life is steeped in rodeo history. Her grand-



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Nikki Albisu, with her horse Scorcher, ran the Pendleton Green Mile for the second time this weekend at the Round-Up Grounds. Albisu is the superintendent of the Ontario School District when she's not barrel racing.

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Nikki Albisu

father Harry Charters, a champion bulldogger, was inducted into the Pendleton Round-Up Hall of Fame in 2006. Her husband Rich Albisu is an experienced team roper. In fact, it was the rodeo that brought the couple together, having met at the Northwest Regional College Rodeo in Idaho years ago.

"To have my mom be able to come and see her horses out here is really important," Albisu said.

Albisu first took up horse riding when she was 3 years old — as soon as she could properly fit on a saddle. Later on, however, her career got in the way — her superintendent position at the Ontario School District caused her to



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Barrel racer Jessica Lewis, who once rode for Blue Mountain Community College and now lives in Benton City, Wash., cuts around a barrel on the Pendleton Green Mile course Sunday at the Round-Up Grounds. Lewis won the competition.

step away from barrel racing for 15 years.

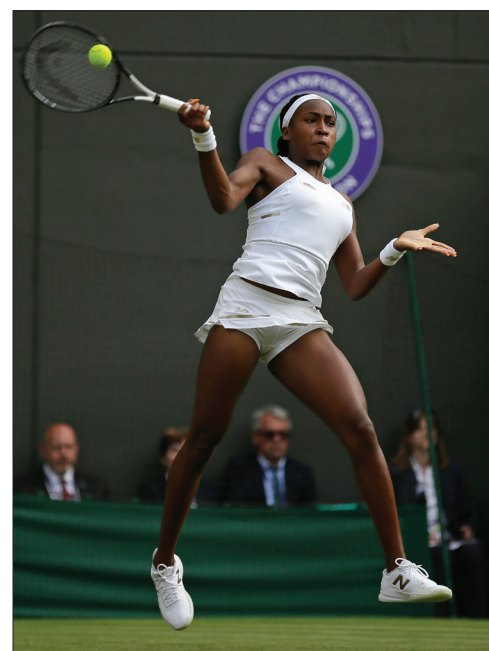
"I just got busy with my career," she said, "but I'm so happy to be back."

She's been back in the barrel racing business for the past three years. This year was her second running the Green Mile, and she has an idea or two of where she wants to take things from here.

Although Albisu is a regular Round-Up attendee, she's never once competed. If everything permits, this year stands a chance to change that.

"If I have a horse that's capable of riding here, I could see myself in the Round-Up (this year)," she said. "I think that's a goal for just about everyone. I'm excited about it."

WIMBLEDON



AP Photo/Tim Ireland

Cori "Coco" Gauff returns to Venus Williams in a singles match Monday during the first day of the Wimbledon Tennis Championships in London.

Gauff, just 15, shocks 5-time champ Venus, 39, at Wimbledon

By **HOWARD FENDRICH**
AP Tennis Writer

WIMBLEDON, England — Coco Gauff grew up admiring the Williams sisters. Picked up a tennis racket as a little girl because of them. And on Monday at Wimbledon, still just 15, Gauff beat one of them.

Gauff, the youngest competitor to qualify at the All England Club in the professional era, showed the poise and power of a much older, much more experienced player, pulling off a 6-4, 6-4 victory in the first round over Venus Williams, who at 39 was the oldest woman in the field.

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Lillard gets supermax deal, and NBA spending spree begins

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
AP Basketball Writer

Damian Lillard wasn't a top-five pick. Tobias Harris wasn't a lottery pick. Khristian Middleton wasn't even a first-round pick.

Their bank balances won't know the difference soon.

Free agency opened Sunday with nearly \$3 billion in deals getting struck in the opening hours — including Kyrie Irving officially picking Brooklyn, as has been expected, but without any word from Kawhi Leonard about his future plans to either stay with NBA champion Toronto or move elsewhere.

Lillard agreed to a \$196 million, four-year extension with Portland that will kick in for the 2021-22 season. Harris is staying in Philadelphia for \$180 million over the next five years and Middleton gave Milwaukee a bit of a discount in agreeing to a \$178 million, five-year deal — \$12 million shy of what he could have commanded.

Even injuries couldn't derail the spending.

Kevin Durant announced that he's leaving Golden State and joining Brooklyn on a max deal — which would be worth \$164 mil-

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SPORTS SHORTS

Angels pitcher Tyler Skaggs dead at 27; found in hotel room

By **STEPHEN HAWKINS**
AP Baseball Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas — Los Angeles Angels pitcher Tyler Skaggs died Monday at the age of 27, stunning Major League Baseball and leading to the postponement of the team's game against the Texas Rangers.

Skaggs was with the team in Texas when he was found unresponsive in his hotel room, police said. He was pronounced dead at the scene. Police said they were investigating, but no foul play was suspected.

Skaggs was "an important part of the Angels Family," the team said in a statement. "Our thoughts and prayers are with

his wife, Carli, and his entire family during this devastating time."

Skaggs, who would have turned 28 on July 13, had been a regular in the Angels' starting rotation since late 2016, when he returned from Tommy John surgery. He struggled with injuries repeatedly over the past three seasons but persevered to become a valuable starter in Los Angeles' injury-plagued rotation.

The left-hander had just pitched on Saturday, allowing two runs in 4⅓ innings in a 4-0 loss to Oakland. He was scheduled to start the series finale at Texas, on the Fourth of July holiday.

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said he was "deeply saddened" by

Skaggs' death.

"We will support the Angels' organization through this most difficult period, and we will make a variety of resources available to Tyler's teammates and other members of the baseball family," Manfred said in a statement.

Skaggs is the first Angels player to die in-season since Nick Adenhart was killed by a drunken driver 10 years ago. The 22-year-old rookie right-hander was coming off his first start of the 2009 season, his fourth career game in the big leagues.

Jose Fernandez, a two-time All-Star pitcher for the Miami Marlins, was killed in boating crash near Miami Beach, Florida, in September 2016.



AP Photo/Chris O'Meara, File

Los Angeles Angels' Tyler Skaggs pitches to the Tampa Bay Rays during a June 13 game in St. Petersburg, Fla. Tyler Skaggs died at age 27 on Monday.