

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

FRIDAY, JULY 12, 2019

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Pepsi Diamondjaxx close season with Hanford split

By BRETT KANE
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pepsi Diamondjaxx closed their season with a battle.

On Thursday, Pendleton's 16U baseball team split with their Hanford visitors. While the Diamondjaxx took the opener 4-2, Hanford escaped with an 11-10 victory to end the day.

Game one was a low-scoring affair until Pendleton's Karson Lani broke it open in the

bottom of the fourth inning with a two-RBI triple into center field that allowed Payton Lambert and Blane Peal to cross home.

Troy Molnaa's sacrifice fly in the top of the sixth finally put Hanford on the board, but the Diamondjaxx responded with Aiden Gunter's RBI-single in the following inning. Peal sent a shallow ground ball to third base, giving Lambert the chance to score and keep Pendleton out front.

Hanford's Drew Johnson posted an RBI sin-

gle late in the final inning, but it wasn't enough to keep pace with the Diamondjaxx.

Peal was not only key at the plate, but also on the mound. He tallied eight strikeouts over 6½ innings, allowing just one hit and two runs. Johnson benched seven Pendleton batters over the full game.

The Diamondjaxx were well on their way to a doubleheader sweep, holding a 6-4 lead by the fourth inning of the nightcap.

That soon fell apart by the top of the fifth.

Hanford rallied with five runs off singles from Tyler Poletski, Corey Foster, Garret Chandler, and Korbin Harris. Kobe Fell, who was sent in to finish the inning in relief, walked the next batter to drive in yet another run, putting Hanford up 10-6.

It was a lead that would last for just an inning as Peal got Pendleton back on track with a triple on a 1-2 pitch that scored two runs in

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WIMBLEDON

Williams to face Halep in Wimbledon final

By HOWARD FENDRICH
AP Tennis Writer

WIMBLEDON, England — Hours before her Wimbledon semifinal, Serena Williams spent some time deep in thought and arrived at a couple of conclusions.

For one thing, she shouldn't focus too much on trying to raise her Grand Slam title total to 24, a number achieved by just one other player in tennis history. And for another, she needs to stay calm on the court.

With that in mind, Williams went out Thursday and made it all look so easy, overwhelming Barbora Strycova of the Czech Republic 6-1, 6-2 in 59 minutes to once again put herself on the verge of an eighth championship at the All England Club and major No. 24 overall.

"It's really not about 24 or 23 or 25. It's really just about going out there and giving my best effort, no matter what. No matter what I do, I will always have a great career," said Williams, who at 37 is the oldest woman to reach a Grand Slam final in the professional era. "Like, I just kind of let it go this morning."

On Saturday, she will take on No. 7-seeded Simona Halep of Romania, a 6-1, 6-3 winner over No. 8 Elina Svitolina of Ukraine under a cloudy sky at Centre Court.

It's the 11th final at the All England Club for Williams, the first for Halep, whose only major trophy came at the French Open last year.

They've played each other 10 previous times, with Williams winning nine, including a three-setter at the Australian Open in January.

"I respect a lot what she has done and what she's doing," said Halep, who, like Williams, used to be ranked No. 1. "But now I feel stronger, mentally, facing her. We will see what is going to happen. It's just a big challenge for me."

For anyone, really, when Williams is at her best.

And after an up-and-down first half of the year, due in part to injury and illness, she sure does appear to have lifted her level considerably.

Williams was limited to 12 matches in 2019 until last week. After a third-round loss at Roland Garros on June 1, she stayed in France for medical treatment and finally felt pain-free while preparing for Wimbledon.

"Well, if she will play like this in the final," said Strycova, 33, the oldest first-time Grand Slam semifinalist in the modern era, "it's going to be very hard for Simona."

After a three-set struggle against Alison Riske in the quarterfinals Tuesday, Williams was dominant against Strycova, who was limited by a leg muscle problem that cropped up in the very first game.

Strycova would repeatedly flex or shake her legs between points or try to stretch in her sideline chair by pulling her right foot onto her left knee and rocking her leg.

Not an ideal situation. Especially when facing Williams if she's this dialed-in.

Williams played cleanly, accumulating nearly twice as many winners as unforced errors, 28-10. She was at her usual court-covering best, which helped limit Strycova to 10 winners.

"I just need to ... relax and do what I can do," Williams said, referring again to her deep thoughts from the morning.

FROM PENDLETON TO UFC

Pendleton-born cage fighter Ricky Simon will fight UFC hall-of-famer Urijah Faber Saturday night



Photo contributed by Amy Kaplan, File

In this March 23, 2018, file photo, Ricky Simon (right) is crowned the winner of the Legacy Fighting Alliance 36 event against Vinicius Zani (left) at the Morongo Casino Resort & Spa in Cabazon, Calif.

By BRETT KANE
East Oregonian

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Ricky Simon has had a busy week.

When he's not training with his head, conditioning, or boxing coach, there's a good chance he's talking to the press and signing posters, for a good reason.

The Pendleton-born mixed martial artist enters the arena on Saturday in Sacramento, Calif., to compete in the UFC Fight Night 155. He's slated to face Urijah Faber, who will be coming out of retirement to compete in his hometown once again.

The two are on a five-fight main card that will air on ESPN+, and the significance of the upcoming bout hasn't been lost on Simon.

"As far as the placement on the bill goes, it's the biggest it's been for me so far," said Simon, 26. "I'm actually on the poster this time. Depending on how many people come out, it could be big. There's going to be some (Faber) fan hostility. I've fought in front of sold-out crowds in the Staples Center last August and in Australia in February. I'm getting used to the big crowds. I love the energy."

Humble beginnings

Although his skills in the cage have sent him all over the globe, Simon's roots are in Eastern Oregon. He spent the first four years of his life in Pendleton before he and his family moved to Vancouver, Washington.

"I still have family in Pendleton,"

Simon said. "I drive through every summer to see my grandma, aunt, and uncle. We'll stop and get coffee, and catch up. It's something I've always done."

It was in Vancouver that his love of wrestling and MMA began to take shape.

"My dad was always watching fights," Simon recalled. "I've always been a big fan. My parents bought boxing gloves for my (three) brothers and I. They had us solve our problems with those. We fought each other all the time. We were raised in a tough family. Now that I think about it, it's not surprising that I ended up with this career."

Simon started wrestling in elementary school and stuck with the sport all throughout high school. After graduating from Union High in 2010, he sought to continue his wrestling career at Clark College in Vancouver, but it was a goal that never came to be.

"I went to (Clark) just to figure out what the hell I was going to do," Simon said.

Simon soon got a second chance, however, when he happened upon the Gladiator gym in a local Vancouver mall.

"It was a full-on MMA gym with a cage," he said. "It was pretty unique. We'd be in there sweating and training while people shopped at Nordstrom across from us."

From there, Simon began his amateur MMA career, which lasted from 2011 until 2014. In that three-year span, he was undefeated.

"There's no blueprint in fighting," he said. "You're just fighting in a regional

circuit. You're not getting paid a lot, and you're paying to fight. You have to scratch and claw your way in. Once you do, it's very rewarding."

A chance to turn pro with the UFC soon followed. For the past year and a half, Simon has been signed with the California-based Iridium Sports Agency, which helps him secure gigs like his upcoming fight against Faber.

"When the UFC calls you, you have four to eight weeks to get ready for the fight," Simon said. "I train three to four times a day, six days a week. It's MMA — you gotta have all of your bases covered."

Cage fighting isn't the most glamorous sport, but it's been kind to Simon so far. He currently holds a 15-1 pro record. His lone loss came via submission against Anderson dos Santos at the Titan Fighting Championship 37 in 2016.

Outside the cage

Although he's since left wrestling behind for something more extreme, Simon still makes it a priority in his life. He's coached teams at Vancouver's Covington Middle School for nine years, and at Heritage High School for two.

"I love it," he said. "I'm in the same community I grew up in. Wrestling had a big impact on my life. It's been a passion of mine."

His opponent isn't the reason his Saturday night fight is significant — it'll also be his first as a married man.

On June 28, Simon wed his longtime girlfriend Jade, 24, in a ceremony held

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SPORTS SHORTS

All-Star Game television rating sets record low

NEW YORK (AP) — Baseball's All-Star Game had a record low television rating.

The American League's 4-3 win over the National League on Tuesday night in Cleveland had a 5.0 rating on Fox, according to Nielsen Media Research. The game was seen by an average of 5.93 million households and 8.14 million viewers.

That is down from the previous record low rat-

ing of 5.2 and 8.69 million viewers for the AL's 8-6, 10-inning victory last year.

The Home Run Derby drew a combined 6.2 million viewers and a 4.54 rating in metered markets on ESPN and ESPN2 on Monday night, up from 5.97 million viewers and a 4.39 rating last year.

The rating is the percentage of television households tuned to a broadcast.



American League pitcher Shane Bieber, of the Cleveland Indians, holds the MVP trophy the MLB baseball All-Star Game on Tuesday in Cleveland. The American League defeated the National League 4-3.

AP Photo/Tony Dejak