

# EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

SATURDAY, JANUARY 2, 2021

FOLLOW US ON  TWITTER @EOSPORTS |  FACEBOOK.COM/EOSPORTS

B1

## SURVIVING ROUGH WATERS

### Pilot Rock community comes together to repair ball field damaged by flood

By ANNIE FOWLER  
For the East Oregonian

**P**ILOT ROCK — Play ball! Those are the words baseball and softball fans in Pilot Rock hope to hear this spring after spending the past several months repairing the Pilot Rock Little League field after a May 20, 2020, flood destroyed the field.

“It has been a tough year,” Pilot Rock Little League president Kris Thieme said. “The water was raging across the field and it was under water. It was dangerous.”

Heavy rains in May caused the East Birch Creek to overflow, not only flooding the ball field but causing damage throughout the small town south of Pendleton.

The adjacent Pilot Rock High School football field was spared, but the ball field, shared by the Little League program and the high school softball team, suffered significant damage.

“We weren’t allowed down there until mid-June,” Thieme said. “It was a mess. First COVID hit, then this. It was extremely overwhelming.”

The water from East Birch Creek tore through part of the outfield, destroyed the infield and damaged the fence. The dugouts also will need to be replaced, and a retaining wall will need to be added behind home plate.

The batting cages, concession/announcer building and a storage container also had to be cleared of mud and debris.

The field is on property owned by the school district, but is maintained by the Little League program. There was no flood insurance on the field.

With a big task at hand, the commu-



A group of boys help lay sod during a work party to repair the damaged Pilot Rock Little League field on Sept. 30, 2020. The ball field was damaged by a flood on May 20, 2020, when East Birch Creek burst its banks and flooded the field and other portions of Pilot Rock.

nity rolled up its sleeves and got to work.

#### Many hands do good work

The Little League board, school administrators and community members devised a plan of action in June.

The Little League program would be in charge of the cleanup and restoration of the field, and the school district would replace the fencing.

Without insurance to fund the project, the League board sought help. It applied for and received a \$2,500 grant from Umatilla Electric Cooperative, and received a matching grant from CoBank. The board also received a \$2,000 grant from Cascade Natural Gas.

“Without those grants, we’d be in a hole,” Thieme said.

Work began on the field on June 23. The debris left behind by the flood filled 13 dump trucks.

Cody Thacker, of Thacker Contracting

LLC, loaned a mini excavator for the work, and Jimmy Doherty, of Eastern Oregon Waste Management, provided a dump truck. McLaughlin Landscaping and RDO Equipment also provided key pieces of equipment, while community members also lent a hand with heavy equipment.

Once the field was cleared, Paul Roe and Eric Snivley worked their magic to bring the field back to life.

Roe, the Little League maintenance manager for the past 18 years, had kept one of the most meticulous fields in the area. He and Snivley put in countless hours to grade and level the field with a small John Deere tractor. They were able to salvage most of the topsoil, saving the program money.

“Those two put in thousands of hours of their time to make this happen,” Thieme said. “Without their knowledge and time, I don’t know what we would have done.”

It’s unbelievable what they did.”

McLaughlin Landscaping stepped in to help fix the irrigation and underground sprinkler system.

By the end of September, the field was ready for sod, which was purchased from Buttercreek Sod in Hermiston.

A work party that included Little League board members and players, community members and employees of McLaughlin Landscaping installed the infield sod on Sept. 30. The school district paid to reseed the outfield.

“If I wanted 500 people, they would have shown up to help,” Thieme said. “The kids helped and the community came together to lend a hand. We appreciate all the help we have received.”

There still is work to be done in regards to the dugouts and fencing, but the Little League program and school district count

See Flood, Page B2

## NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

### NFL races go down to the wire in AFC South and NFC East

By BARRY WILNER  
Associated Press

NEW YORK — As the calendar turns to 2021, the NFL is experiencing pretty much what it covets. Try two division races, and five wild-card berths out of six still undecided.

Not to go unnoticed, naturally, is that the league is about to finish an entire schedule on time, with a few postponements but not nearly the disruptions plaguing the other major sports organizations in 2020.

The focus in Week 17 will range from coast to coast. Miami, Baltimore, Cleveland, Tennessee and Indianapolis are chasing post-season qualification in the AFC, while the Cardinals, Rams, Bears, Giants, Cowboys and Washington seek NFC spots.

#### AFC South

Both contenders for this division face

NFL tailenders. The Titans have everything in their control, while the Colts need assistance.

#### Tennessee (10-5) at Houston (4-11)

“It doesn’t get any more clear than it is for us right now,” Titans quarterback Ryan Tanneill says. “We win this game, find a way to win, win the division. That’s one of the things we set out to do this year. It’s pretty clear what we need to do. We just have to go out and make it happen.”

To do so, and take the AFC South for the first time since 2008, they’ll certainly rely on Derrick Henry. He’s assured of repeating as NFL rushing champ, the first since Hall of Famer LaDainian Tomlinson in 2006-07. Henry has a career-high 1,777 yards rushing and ran for 212 yards in his most recent game against the Texans. He had 211 yards

See Races, Page B2

### Metcalf on verge of toppling 35-year-old Seahawks record

By TIM BOOTH  
Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — As DK Metcalf was finishing up his rookie season a year ago, he took a glance at the Seattle Seahawks record book.

After having 900 yards receiving as a rookie, Metcalf knew the single-season franchise record was well within reach.

“I knew it was going to be on the agenda this year to break it,” Metcalf said.

Metcalf will likely need just one catch on Sunday, Jan. 3, to topple the record that has stood for 35 years.

He is 6 yards shy of besting Steve Largent’s single-season franchise record. Largent had 1,287 receiving yards in 1985, the best of a nine-season run during which the Hall of Famer topped 1,000 yards eight times. Largent only failed to reach the mark

during the strike-shortened 1982 season.

The Seahawks can only hope this season is the beginning of a similar run by its young second-year star, who with each passing week looks more like one of biggest draft steals in recent memory.

“He can make every catch, do everything you want him to do,” quarterback Russell Wilson said. “To be even mentioned in the same category as a guy like Steve Largent so early is a blessing in itself.”

Metcalf goes into Week 17 against San Francisco already among the elite in the league. He’s sixth in the league in yards receiving (1,282), touchdown catches (10) and yards per reception (16.0). He’s just the second wide receiver in team history to receive a Pro Bowl selection in his first two seasons, joining Brian Blades.

See Seahawks, Page B2

## SPORTS SHORT

### U.S. beats Sweden 4-0 for 3rd straight shutout, wins Group B

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Boston College’s Spencer Knight made 27 saves and the United States opened the first and second periods with two-goal bursts to beat Sweden 4-0 on Thursday night, Dec. 31, 2020, and win Group B in the world junior hockey championship.

The United States will face Slovakia — the fourth-place finisher in Group A — in the quarterfinals Saturday, Jan. 2.

After opening with a 5-3 loss to Russia, the United States has reeled off a team-record three straight shutouts, beating Austria 11-0 and

the Czech Republic 7-0 to set up the showdown with Sweden for the top spot in the group.

Boston College’s Drew Helleison and Boston University’s Trevor Zegras scored in the first four minutes, and Minnesota’s Ryan Johnson and Wisconsin’s Alex Turcotte connected in quick succession early in the second.

Sweden lost in regulation in the preliminary round for the first time since falling 2-0 to Canada in 2006.

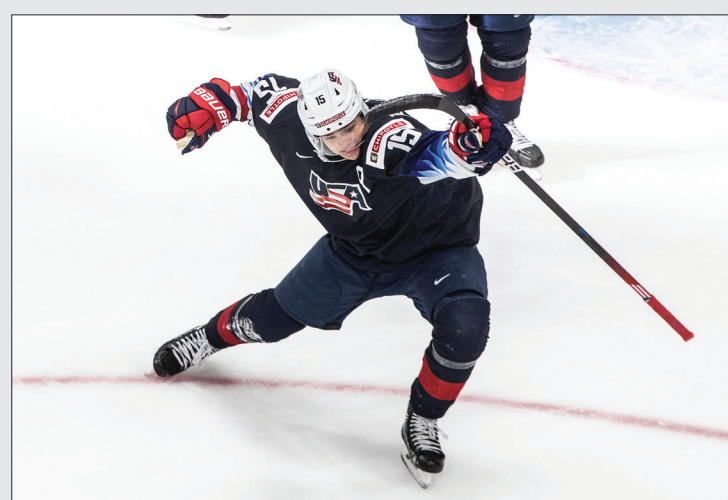
In the other quarterfinals, defending champion Canada will play the Czech Republic, Sweden will face Finland, and Russia will play Germany.

Earlier, Dylan Cozens scored twice, Devon Levi made 18 saves and Canada beat Finland 4-1 to win Group A.

Dylan Holloway and Peyton Krebs also scored to help Canada complete pool play 4-0. Brad Lambert scored for Finland.

In the first game of the day, the Czech Republic took the final Group B slot in the quarterfinals, routing Austria 7-0. Austria finished 0-4, and is 0-21 in the event.

Martin Lang scored twice for Finland. Simon Kubicek, Filip Prikryl, Pavel Novak, David Juricek and Jan Mysak added goals and Nick Malik made 15 saves.



Jason Franson/Associated Press

United States’ Alex Turcotte celebrates his goal against Sweden during the second period of an IIHF World Junior Hockey Championship game on Thursday, Dec. 31, 2020, in Edmonton, Alberta.