

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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B1

EOU's Nichols advances to finals at NAIA national meet

Top 8 showing earns Heppner grad All-America honors

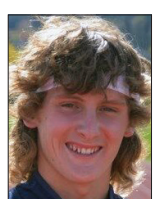
By ANNIE FOWLER
For the East Oregonian

YANKTON, S.D. — Less than two weeks ago, Hunter Nichols found out he earned a trip to the NAIA Indoor National Track &

Field Championships.

The Eastern Oregon University sophomore not only ran at nationals on Thursday, March 4, but made the finals of the 1,000 meters and earned All-America honors for being in the top eight of his event.

"I can't complain," the 2019 Heppner graduate said. "I wasn't even ranked in the top 16 to begin



Nichols

with. I'll take it."

As to being an All-American? "I was pretty happy about that," he said.

Running in the semifinals at the Ruth Donohoe First Dakota Fieldhouse at Mount Marty University, Nichols was in the second of two heats.

He finished fourth in his heat in a time of 2 minutes, 31.91 seconds, and is seeded seventh going into the finals.

"It was definitely slow," Nichols said of his heat. "Actually, the

whole field was slow. I don't think it was sluggish, people were just trying to make it to the finals without using everything up."

The race was run on a flat 200-meter track, which was a first for Nichols.

"It was weird," he said. "I have never run on a flat 200. I haven't even run indoors in more than a year."

The 1,000-meter finals are at 11 a.m. Saturday, March 6. Nichols said there is no clear-cut favorite.

"Everyone was right there," he

said. "The times were not far apart. There are a couple of guys who have an edge, but it will be a toss-up as to who races harder."

The difference between the top time and eighth is 2.50 seconds.

Nichols' top time of the season is 2:30.53, which ranks eighth all-time in the Mounties' record book.

Nichols had March 5 off, which consisted of a COVID test in the morning, watching his EOU teammates compete in the heptathlon, and getting in an afternoon run to prepare for the March 6 finals.

2A BASKETBALL



Knappa fans cheer on a 3-point shot during the semifinal round of the Oregon School Activities Association 2A State Basketball Tournament at the Pendleton Convention Center on March 6, 2020. The Toledo Boomers defeated the Knappa Loggers 69-46.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

MISSING HOOPS

Pendleton coping with cancellation of Class 2A state basketball tournament due to pandemic

By ANNIE FOWLER
For the East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton should have been jam-packed this weekend with the annual 2A state boys and girls basketball tournaments at the Pendleton Convention Center.

Colorful jackets adorned with team names and logos, full hotels, and waiting lines at restaurants are generally the norm the first weekend of March.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, none of that will happen, much to the disappointment of the local businesses, basketball teams and fans.



Beard



Rosenberg



Welch

"It's a big loss without the 2A tournament," Pendleton Convention Center General Manager Pat Beard said. "It's the first tourism event of the year. It wakes everyone up and gets them ready. Not having them kick things off, it will take longer to gauge everything."

The tournament infuses more than \$1 million into the local economy every year.

"Pendleton loves to have company, and we are a great host," Beard said. "We get to welcome every small-school athlete to Pendleton and make them feel at home."

Oregon School Activities Association Assistant Executive Director Kris Welch said Pendleton is committed to putting on a first-class event.

"It's the little details, he said. 'I know the

amount of work and energy that goes into this. They are meeting months in advance. It goes off without a hitch. It's fantastic."

The venue holds 3,200 people, and the tournament welcomes more than 10,000 paying fans each year.

While it's always good to have local teams in the tournament, Beard said the big money is made off the hotel taxes.

"When Heppner plays, the building is packed and ticket sales are good," Beard said. "What the convention center lives on is the taxes from lodging. When the west side schools show up, we make money."

A community event

The tournament is a collaboration between the OSAA and the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce. The Round-Up City has hosted the tournament for more than 50 years.

"The loss of this event is a big hit for businesses, not only in revenue but it kicks off our event season," Chamber Executive Director Cheri Rosenberg said. "Given everything that

See Class 2A, Page B2

1A BASKETBALL



S. John Collins/Baker City Herald, File
Powder Valley's Belle Blair, in blue, during the 2018 Class 1A state basketball tournament at Baker High School.

State tourneys take a year off

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Kathy Taylor is supposed to be exhausted right now.

She should be rushing from one task to another this week, with scarcely a spare moment to rest.

Taylor wishes that were so.

For more than a quarter century, the first week of March has meant one thing for Kathy and her husband, Rick — basketball.

Specifically, the Class 1A state basketball girls and boys tournaments at Baker High School. It's the culmination of the season for Oregon's smallest high schools, the week when players from towns, some of which lack a single traffic signal, try to win one of those glossy trophies carved in the shape of the state.

Kathy Taylor has been co-director of the annual tournaments, which Baker County Tournaments has run since 2017. But she and her husband have volunteered to help with the events since 1994.

The tournaments themselves have an even longer legacy at BHS. The boys tournament has taken place there every year since 1974, and the girls tournament moved to Baker City in 1977.

Then came the pandemic.

And with high school basketball not scheduled to start in Oregon until May, and no state tournaments planned, 2021 will be the year of the asterisk.

See Class 1A, Page B2

SPORTS SHORT

Grosjean hit barrier at 119 mph with 67 G force in F1 crash

Associated Press

PARIS — Romain Grosjean was going 119 mph when he hit a metal crash barrier and his car exploded into a fireball around him at the Bahrain Grand Prix.

The impact was estimated at 67 Gs, a force equivalent to 67 times his body weight. By comparison, heavy braking in an F1 car produces about 6 Gs.

The findings came from an investigation into the horror crash in November 2020 by governing body the FIA that concluded on Friday, March 5, and will be presented to the drivers' commission on Tuesday, March 9.

The French driver made an astonishing escape from the raging furnace.

Grosjean's Haas car sliced in half after penetrating the barrier and quickly caught fire. He was trapped inside the cockpit for 27 seconds before scrambling out, yanking his jammed foot out of his racing boot in order to do so.

He suffered only minor burns to the back of his hands and a sprained left ankle, and was discharged from hospital soon after.

The crash happened on the opening lap when the right rear wheel of his car clipped the left front wheel of Russian driver Daniil Kvyat's AlphaTauri, when

attempting to pass from the left to right-hand side of the Sakhir track.

"The fuel tank inspection hatch on the left-hand side of the chassis was dislodged and the engine fuel supply connection was torn from the fuel tank ... providing primary paths for the escape of fuel," the FIA said in a statement. "Fire was ignited during the final moments of the barrier impact, starting from the rear of the survival cell and progressing forwards towards the driver."

The ring-shaped halo device at the front of Grosjean's cockpit protected his head by withstanding the huge impact, and he credited it with saving his life.



Brynn Lennon/Associated Press, File

Staff extinguish flames from Haas driver Romain Grosjean of France's car after a crash during the Formula One race in Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir, Bahrain, on Nov. 29, 2020.