

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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Oregon Duck Thibodeaux hopes to strike the Heisman pose

By RYAN THORBURN
The (Eugene) Register-Guard

EUGENE — Kayvon Thibodeaux might have a creative new way of celebrating sacks next season.

By striking the Heisman pose.

The All-American defensive end isn't shying away from the lofty 2021 expectations for Oregon.

Thibodeaux, who led the Ducks in sacks and tackles for loss the last

two seasons, will be featured in new defensive coordinator Tim DeRuyter's scheme at the "Joker" position made famous by Von Miller, now with the Denver Broncos, at Texas A&M.

Oregon's most talented player is already in a New York state of mind when it comes to the Heisman Trophy race.

"Coach DeRuyter does have a great plan in place. One of my goals is to try to win the Heisman,"

Thibodeaux said during a Zoom with the media following spring practice last week. "He honestly just puts me in more positions to make plays. A lot of guys, honestly, not just me."

In 1997, Michigan's Charles Woodson became the only "primarily defensive player" to win the Heisman.

The list of defensive linemen who have been finalists for the award in the last 30 years is limited

to Washington's Steve Emtman (fourth, 1991), Miami's Warren Sapp (sixth, 1994) and Nebraska's Ndamukong Suh (fourth, 2009).

Oregon coach Mario Cristobal didn't pour any cold water on Thibodeaux's hot take.

"I think it's very possible for a defensive player," Cristobal said of winning the Heisman. "The thing about K.T., he's a high achiever and he wants to be around guys who are into high achievement standards."

"He sees himself as limitless. We feel the same way, sky is the limit for him."

Championship drive

During Oregon's victory over USC in the 2020 Pac-12 championship game, Thibodeaux flashed his seemingly boundless potential with 12 quarterback pressures, two tackles for loss and a sack to win the

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THE NEXT LEVEL

Two-time Eastern Oregon League MVP Makenna Collins headed to EWU

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

IRRIGON — The first time Makenna Collins watched a college volleyball match she was 11 years old. Her cousin, Nicole Rigoni, was a setter for Eastern Washington University, and she was captivated by the sport.

"It was right then and there that I decided I wanted to play college volleyball," Collins said. "It's interesting to look back and I have a story to tell."

Her dream of college volleyball came to fruition late last year when she signed to play at EWU.

Collins was one of four players who signed with the Eagles on Nov. 10, 2020.

"Our 2021 class is a group of hardworking, ambitious and talented women," EWU coach Leslie Flores-Cloud said in a news release. "They have been dialed in to EWU volleyball for quite some time and are ready to jump in and become Eagles."

Collins, a libero, decided EWU was the place for her after her sophomore year in high school.

"I went to a camp up there," she said. "They invite you to the camp, and that's where I would be fighting for a spot with other liberos. I went to camp in July, and in September they said they wanted me to come play with them. I jumped on that."

Flores-Cloud was not going to let the 5-foot-3 defensive specialist slip away.

"Makenna came to camp and knocked my socks off," Flores-Cloud said. "She might be the smallest in the gym, but she's also the most dialed in. Her serve receive and defense is outstanding, she is sure to be a fantastic defender for us."

From there, Collins went on an official visit. She saw the campus, met college professors, watched a volleyball match, and hung out with the team.

"After that, I decided Eastern was the place I wanted to play," Collins said.

Irrigon competes in the 3A Eastern Oregon League, where Collins has been a first-team, all-league libero for three years, and was the EOL Player of the Year her sophomore and junior years.

The Knights advanced to the 3A state tournament in 2018 for the first time in



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Irrigon's Makenna Collins (1) serves the ball during the first set against the Stanfield Tigers. The Irrigon Knights defeated the Stanfield Tigers 3-0 on March, 9, 2021, at Irrigon High School.

school history. They lost in the first round to South Umpqua and finished the season with a 14-10 record.

Last year, the Knights (15-13) fell short of the state tournament with a loss to Burns at the district tournament, but it's her club volleyball play that has put her on the map.

Collins has played for Club Gold out of the Tri-Cities since she was 11 years old.

"They (colleges) look at club," Collins said. "You learn some life lessons and play against some of the best teams in the nation."

Club ball may be the key to playing in college, but it's hard to ignore the stats Collins put up in her first three years at Irrigon.

She had 608 digs, 151 aces, 100 assists and every libero's dream — 30 kills.

"There are times I will hit from the back

row," Collins said. "That's where I satisfy my need to hit. I didn't get blessed with height, so I get to sacrifice my body and fly all over the floor."

At EWU, Collins will be stepping into a position that has been held by Catelyn Linke the past few years. Linke has been moving up the list in the EWU record book for career digs, and is ranked sixth.

"She is really good," Collins said. "She is super cool. I'm excited to take over for her."

It might be a year or two before Collins gets her shot, but she's willing to put in the work.

"The first couple of years depend on how good I play and fit into the role they need me to play," Collins said. "I hope to make the travel team as a freshman, but it's hard to get that spot."

Life on the other side

Umatilla graduate enjoys winning side of football at Carroll College

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

HELENA, Mont. — When Trent Durfey played football at Umatilla High School, the Vikings had just one winning season.

As a redshirt freshman at Carroll College, Durfey and his fellow Saints are co-champions of the Frontier Conference and headed to the first round of the NAIA Football Championship Series.



Durfey

"It was absolutely surreal," Durfey said of winning a conference title. "When that buzzer rang, all the memories of playing in Umatilla, and the summer workouts in the weight room with my dad (Dan) came rushing back. This is what it feels like to win. We used to lose by a lot of points in high school. To be on the other side is a big change of scenery."

The Saints (3-1), who are the 16th seed in the playoffs, will take on the top-ranked Morningside Mustangs on Saturday, April 17, in Sioux City, Iowa. Morningside (8-0), which has won the past two NAIA titles, last played Nov. 21, 2020, as its season was played in the fall.

It's the first trip to the playoffs for Carroll College since 2014.

"We were on a high for about 12 hours," Durfey said. "We found out (on Sunday, April 11) who we were playing, and now it's time to focus on the next game."

The 6-foot-2, 240-pound Durfey, who is majoring in health sciences, has started at outside linebacker and defensive end for the Saints. He had five tackles in Carroll College's 28-19 win over College of Idaho on Saturday, April 10, that gave them a share of the conference title with the Coyotes.

As a former high school hurdler, the Saints like Durfey's speed combined with his physical game.

"This has been a dream season,"

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SPORTS SHORT

AP sources: NCAA dumps requirement that transfers sit a year

By RALPH D. RUSSO
AP College Football Writer

INDIANAPOLIS — Starting next season, major college football and basketball players will be permitted to transfer one time before graduating without being required to sit out a year of competition.

The NCAA Division I Council voted Wednesday, April 14, to change the long-standing rule that has often deterred players in high-profile sports from switching schools, two people with knowledge of the council's decision told The Associated Press.

The people spoke on condition of anonymity because two-day meeting was still in session and the council's decisions would

not become official until it ends Thursday, April 15. The Athletic first reported the council's vote.

The so-called, one-time exception has been available to athletes in other NCAA sports for years, allowing them to transfer and play immediately. Athletes in football, men's and women's basketball, men's ice hockey and baseball have not had that available to them without asking the NCAA for a special waiver and claiming a hardship caused the need for a transfer.

Athletes who have graduated have also been permitted to transfer without sitting out, but not undergraduates.

Starting this fall semester, all athletes will be operating under the same rules: Transfers will be

allowed to play right away.

Those in fall and winter sports must notify their schools they intend to transfer by May 1; in spring sports, the notification date will be July 1. The notification dates begin in 2022.

For this year, athletes in all sports will be required to notify their schools about their intent to transfer by July 1.

The council also voted to let the current dead period in recruiting in all sports expire June 1. A ban in in-person recruiting has been in place for more than a year because of the pandemic. Coaches will again be permitted to visit recruits off campus, hold camps on campus and welcome prospective student-athletes on official recruiting visits.



Paul Vernon/Associated Press, File

Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields throws during an NFL Pro Day at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, on March 30, 2021.