

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

TUESDAY, APRIL 20, 2021

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COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Beavers' tourney run opening doors to prominent prospects

By NICK DASCHEL
The Oregonian

CORVALLIS — Oregon State's Elite Eight run has long since come and gone, but in one respect, it's still a fresh topic to some who matter most.

Men's basketball recruits looking at Oregon State as their college destination.

In most cases, amend that to next college destination, as this spring's recruiting attention has turned to the NCAA transfer portal.

The Beavers have at least two roster spots to fill with the departure of transfers Julien Franklin and Tariq Silver.

Asked if he expects others currently on the roster to consider the portal, OSU coach Wayne Tinkle said, "In this day and age, you never know. We're prepared. We're involved with some pretty good guys. You never know once you start signing a guy or two, how guys will respond to that. We'll see. I know we'll be prepared to deal with whatever comes our way."

Tinkle can't talk about specific transfer prospects, but his coaching staff isn't having trouble developing conversations with prominent players. Several are thought to have ties to Power 5 programs.

It's the byproduct of an Elite Eight run, the school's first in 39 years.

Still, there's some frustration on Tinkle's behalf, as pandemic restrictions keep him from bringing recruits to campus until at least the summer months. By the end of spring, most of the worthwhile transfer prospects will have a new home.

"We're working hard, doing the FaceTime campus tours and that sort of thing," Tinkle said. "But you'd



Al Powers/Pac-12 Conference, File/Bend Bulletin

Oregon State men's basketball coach Wayne Tinkle celebrates with players Ethan Thompson (5) and Zach Reichle (11) after the Beavers upset Colorado in the Pac-12 Conference tournament title game in Las Vegas in March. Tinkle credits the leadership roles taken on by Thompson and Reichle as key in the Beavers' improbable post-season run.

like to get them on campus and close the door."

Officially, there remains no word on whether seniors Ethan Thompson or Zach Reichle will return for the 2021-22 season. Tinkle said earlier this week that neither is currently in Corvallis. He'll have a conversation with Thompson and Reichle at some point this spring. Tinkle said he's leaving any formal announcement about their futures to the players.

Tinkle is expecting to have a close-to-normal offseason workout schedule during the summer, provided players are able to get vaccinations. Though given the current nature of college basketball and the abundance of transfers,

many teams won't have their rosters set until mid-summer or later.

Joining Oregon State's program are Memphis transfer forward Ahmad Rand and guard Dashawn Davis, currently at Trinity Valley Community College. Rand has been on campus since January. Davis is still playing, as Trinity Valley is in the NJCAA championship tournament April 19-24.

On Wednesday, April 14, Chol Marial, a 7-foot-2 center who played two years at Maryland, announced he is transferring to Oregon State.

Marial was rated by ESPN as the No. 58 prospect for the national recruiting class of 2019.

Marial averaged 1.3 points and

1.3 rebounds during his two years at Maryland.

Marial played sparingly as a freshman at Maryland after battling leg injuries. As a sophomore, the 235-pound Marial played double-digit minutes in several early-season games, but his playing time diminished as the season progressed.

Not officially announced by Oregon State but committed to join the Beavers is guard Xzavier Malone-Key, who opted out of Fairleigh Dickinson's 2020-21 season. He comes to Oregon State as a graduate transfer.

Tinkle said it's a little early to develop a nonconference schedule. Oregon State is slated to play in the

Emerald Coast Classic, a four-team tournament that includes Louisiana State, Penn State and Wake Forest, on Nov. 26-27 in Niceville, Fla.

Also up in the air is the number of nonconference games, as it's unclear as to whether the Pac-12 will play 18 or 20 conference games. The Pac-12 played a 20-game schedule this past season because of the pandemic, but previously played 18 games. Tinkle leans toward a 20-game conference schedule.

Regardless of how the roster and schedule comes together in 2021-22, reclaiming the magic chemistry of this past season is the priority. A season appearing to be headed nowhere suddenly emerged into a historical one at Oregon State because of a term Tinkle wore out down the stretch: buy-in.

Getting everyone to commit for the good of the team is a challenge, Tinkle admits. It didn't happen overnight with the 2020-21 Beavers. There were some hideous losses and COVID-19 stoppages during the first half of the season. But down the stretch, Tinkle seemingly could turn to any player for a big moment.

"It's a credit to them, but it's a challenge every year," Tinkle said. "You've got a lot of people maybe outside of the locker room that are giving opinions on how you should be played and freedom you should be allowed. It's tough to deal with that. But this group put all that aside, obviously."

The leadership of Thompson and Reichle was instrumental in selling the message, Tinkle said. It particularly blossomed when the typically reserved Thompson began to express himself vocally to teammates.

"They really stepped it up leadership-wise, when we needed it most," Tinkle said.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Ducks have strength, depth among RBs

By JAMES CREPEA
The Oregonian

EUGENE — C.J. Verdell thought about leaving for the NFL, but that was before.

Before a shortened 2020 season. Before an injury to his left thumb. Before the Oregon iron horse missed the first two games of his career.

Verdell met with Mario Cristobal, offensive coordinator Joe Moorhead and running backs coach Jim Mastro after the season and said he'd return for a fourth season in five years.

"I love Oregon, I love the team here, I love the coaching staff, a great environment overall," Verdell said. "Coming back was never something that I was like, 'No I don't want to do that.' Talking with my parents they were with me 100% whatever I chose and when I said I wanted to come back they was with me full bore."

A 1,000-yard rusher in 2018 and 2019, Verdell is one of the best running backs in the Pac-12 and the country when healthy. But in just five games last season he had only 65 carries for 285 yards and three touchdowns.

Verdell said the left thumb injury that kept him out of the Pac-12 Championship game against USC and the Fiesta Bowl actually happened during the Washington State game, when he had 18 carries for 118 yards and a score, and not the UCLA game, when he fumbled and saw his workload fall dramatically afterward.

He said there was "a whole lot going on" with the injury, including a torn ligament and bone fracture.

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New adventures await

Irrigon's Emma Mueller to play volleyball at Notre Dame of Maryland University

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

IRRIGON — When Emma Mueller decided she wanted to play college volleyball, she was determined to stay in Oregon, pay in-state tuition and be closer to home.

A year later, the Irrigon senior has signed to play at Notre Dame of Maryland University in Baltimore — about as far away from home as she can possibly get.

"I had a very long college process," Mueller said. "The start of my junior year, I reached out to colleges. I wanted to stay in state, but at the end of my junior year and the start of my senior year, my mind started shifting."

Mueller connected with a recruiter online, who helped put her in touch with coaches throughout the country. That's how she found Notre Dame of Maryland University.

"I went on a visit in February, and here we are today," said Mueller, who is a setter. "I'm excited to do this for myself. My goal was to have new experiences, learn from new experiences and meet new people."

NDMU is Maryland's only women's college — one of only 33 in the United States. While that was intriguing to Mueller, it did not deter her.

"That was never a big thing to me," she said. "I thought it was interesting. I'd never heard of an all-girls college. As I started talking to the volleyball girls and others at the college, they said



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Irrigon's Emma Mueller (3) sets the ball during a 3-0 win over the Stanfield Tigers at Irrigon High School on March 9, 2021.

how they liked how they could speak freely, dress how they want, and express themselves more. Hearing about their experiences, I thought it would be a good fit."

The Gators compete in the Colonial States Athletic Conference and have won the past two conference titles. They compete at the NCAA Division III level.

The NDMU campus is close to Baltimore Harbor, and the city is full of museums, monuments, sporting events and was named one of the top 10 U.S. cities for

food lovers.

"There really is a lot to do," Mueller said.

Mueller plans to major in nursing, and would like to work in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit with babies.

NDMU has a state-of-the-art facility equipped with computer-powered human simulator mannequins, allowing students to practice nursing skills in a realistic and risk-free environment.

Mueller, who is Irrigon's co-valedictorian for the Class

of 2021 with Alyssa Luna, has received a presidential scholarship from NDMU, which will cover her tuition for four years.

"I still can't believe I got that," Mueller said.

A life of volleyball

Mueller has been playing volleyball since she was in the fourth grade. She has always been a setter, but it took her a while to master her craft.

"At first, I wasn't very good at it," she said. "But after I quit growing (she is 5-6), I realized it was either setting or being a defensive specialist."

Her love of the sport grew when she started playing club volleyball for Club Gold out of the Tri-Cities in Washington with her good friend Makenna Collins, who recently signed to play at Eastern Washington University.

"That ignited the spark," Mueller said of club volleyball. "I'm ever thankful for club and the opportunities it has given me. I have gotten to play against some of the best players in the country. Our families are best friends. This will be an adjustment for them."

Irrigon competes in the tough 3A Eastern Oregon League with the likes of Burns, Nyssa and Vale. Mueller was an honorable mention selection as a sophomore, and a first-team setter as a junior.

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

"I'm thankful I grew up in a small town," Mueller said. "You have to learn how to work and make your own games. Being on a farm helped form me as the person I am today, but I'm excited for a change of scenery."