

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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A10

BOUND FOR MINNEAPOLIS

Pendleton infielder/pitcher Nic Sheley signs with North Central University

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton High School baseball team has been sending players to the college level for years.

This season, the Bucks are up to three.

Infielder/pitcher Nic Sheley has signed to play for North Central University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Rams are a NCAA Division III program that plays in the Upper Midwest Athletic Conference.

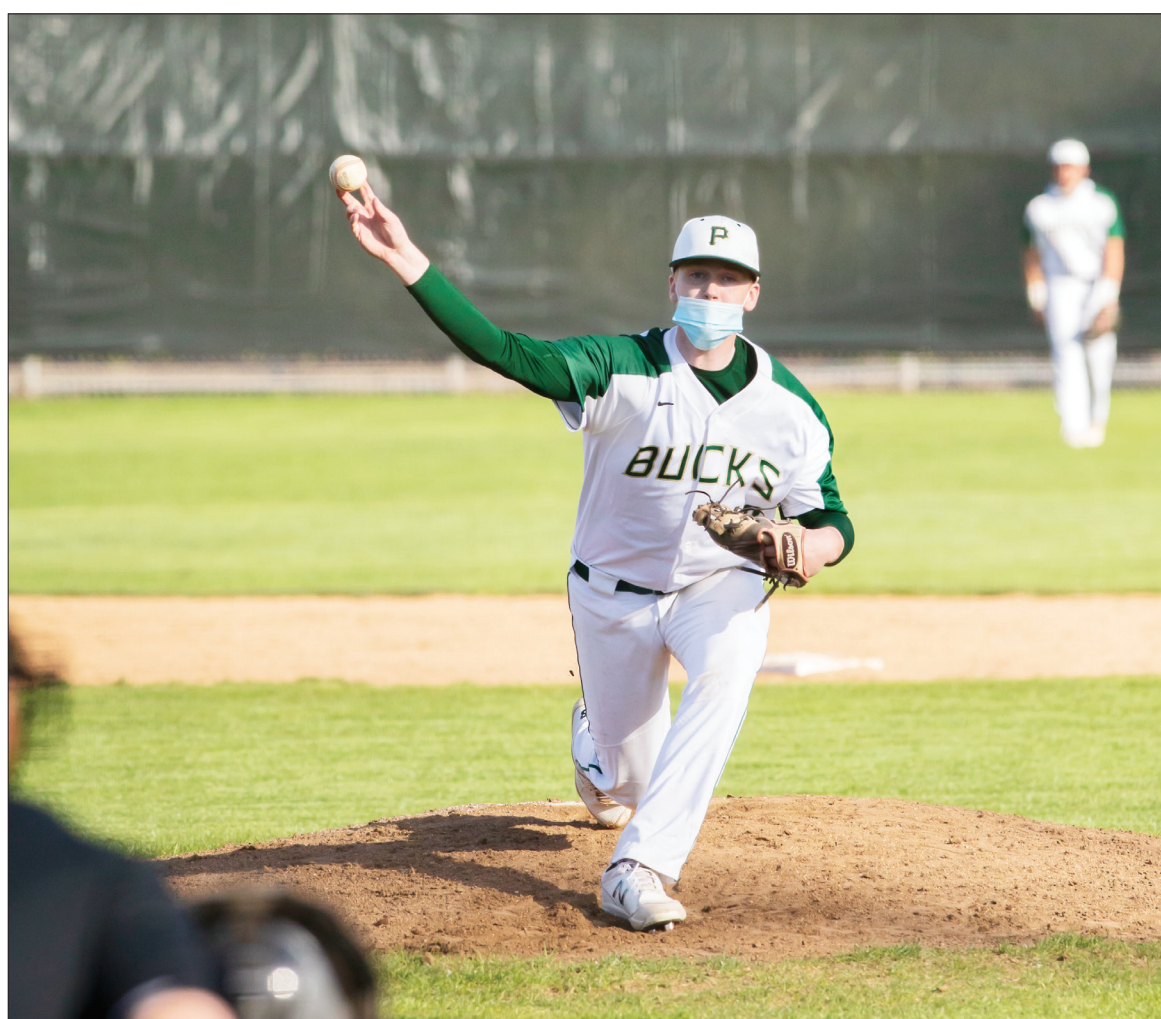
“We are excited to have him here,” Rams coach David Babcock said. “Seeing video of him, he looks like a Division II player, which would be able to help us right away.”

The Bucks also have had Kyle Field sign with Community Colleges of Spokane, and Tucker Zander with Eastern Oregon University.

“The goal of any coach is to get their players recognized at the next level,” Pendleton coach TJ Hague-wood said. “When someone goes to the next level, it is the combination of summer ball, camps and high school programs. A lot goes into it. We can’t take all the credit.”

Sheley, who moved to Pendleton the summer between his sophomore and junior years of high school, played summer ball with most of his high school teammates, but the COVID-19 pandemic canceled his junior year of high school ball, making the recruiting process a little more difficult.

“With my dad being an Assembly of God pastor, I was reaching



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Pendleton’s Nic Sheley (13) delivers a pitch against Hood River Valley on Tuesday, April 13, 2021. Sheley has signed to play for North Central University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Rams are a NCAA Division III program that plays in the Upper Midwest Athletic Conference.

out to schools with a connection to the church,” he said. “I reached out to North Central and got a hit, which was nice.”

Babcock didn’t hesitate to take a good look at Sheley.

“In recruiting Nic, we had a connection through the Assembly of God church,” he said. “We thought he would be a good fit for us, as a person and a player.”

Sheley played his first two seasons of high school ball for South Albany before his family moved to Pendleton.

“The competition is different

because of the area we are in,” Sheley said. “I think I was expecting a little more competition, but because of COVID, everyone’s programs are a little different right now.”

Being the new kid on the block, Sheley had to earn his roster spot, which was fine by him.

“It has been nice to have to push myself to earn a spot,” he said. “I play wherever coach needs me. I have great teammates, which has made the transition great.”

Haguewood said he got a call from South Albany coach Brad

Kidd, who gave Sheley a glowing recommendation.

“He told me I had a good family coming in, and that he was a good kid,” Haguewood said. “This family has been a great addition to our baseball family and community. Nic is a good teammate and has been a benefit to us.”

Sheley has shown marked improvement since he first arrived in Pendleton, and Haguewood has taken notice.

“He has improved in the short time he has been here,” Hague-wood said. “He’s gotten bigger

and stronger, he’s very versatile, and he’s consistent on the hill. He has different types of pitches that have movement and it disrupts the hitter’s timing. In the field, he has soft hands and is working on getting his hands and feet faster. He’s a great kid who has a lot of potential in a lot of avenues of life.”

The Bucks are off to a 5-1 start heading into their Tuesday, April 27, game at The Dalles.

“We are off to a pretty good start,” Sheley said. “At South Albany, we were an underdog team. We’d pull off some wins no one thought we would.”

In the middle of the action

North Central University is located in the midst of the major league teams in Minneapolis, which gives the students an opportunity to take in their favorite sports.

With cold and snowy winters in Minneapolis, the Rams get to play at least one doubleheader at U.S. Bank Stadium, home of the Minnesota Vikings.

“That’s fun for the players,” Babcock said.

Sheley plans to major in sports management with an emphasis on coaching. He would like to be a baseball coach.

North Central also is a stone’s throw from museums, historic buildings, Mall of America, and if you are adventurous there is the Minneapolis Food Tour in June.

The university also is 3 miles north of the intersection where George Floyd died last year. Floyd’s memorial was held in the sanctuary on the campus.

Sheley said the civil unrest in Minneapolis is concerning, but it did not deter him from selecting North Central.

“I think I will feel safe on the school campus,” he said. “I’ve been praying through these times. Part of the reason I chose North Central was because of how involved they are in the community.”

Oregon State QB looking to prove he’s a worthy starter in 2021

By NICK DASCHEL
The Oregonian

CORVALLIS — The final minutes of the longest, weirdest college football season were about to end in December 2020 when Oregon State coach Jonathan Smith turned to freshman quarterback Ben Gulbranson.

In a nutshell, Smith asked Gulbranson, wanna play?

Wanna play? You mean after graduating early from high school and enrolling at Oregon State in January? Having spring practice pulled and wondering for months if there would be a football season because of coronavirus? Then when a season finally emerges, playing games inside empty stadiums?

Wanna play?
“I was all for it,” Gulbranson said.

That one series, culminating in an 18-yard touchdown pass to Zeria Beason on the final play of Oregon State’s 2020 football season, served as Gulbranson’s college baptism. It’s a piece of



Amanda Loman/Associated Press, File

Oregon State quarterback Ben Gulbranson (17) throws to an open receiver against Arizona State in Corvallis in December 2020. The young signal caller got his first taste of live action in the team’s last series of the season, and he capitalized by throwing a touchdown pass to receiver Zeria Beason.

proof that enthusiasm for the 6-foot-3, 216-pounder with a big arm has merit.

“It was huge for his confidence,” offensive coordinator Brian Lind-

gren said. “Just the fact that I went out there, I did some things, I made some plays, in the Pac-12. OK, I know I can do this. I can build on this.”

Given Gulbranson’s position of quarterback, that final series was beyond personal.

“I think it gives his teammates confidence,” Lindgren said. “It kind of opened everybody’s eyes around the program, coaches and players.”

That one series, combined with Gulbranson’s work last fall in practice, confirmed that he’s ready to challenge as Oregon State’s next starting quarterback. This spring, Gulbranson and redshirt sophomore Chance Nolan are taking turns with the starting unit, as Tristan Gebbia heals from a hamstring surgery. Those three are expected to duel for the starting job when preseason practices commence in August.

“He’s very much like Tristan. Really sharp, really understands the game. Loves football,” Lindgren said. “One of those guys that’s kind of a gym rat, always around the facility trying to get more information.”

Gulbranson knows what it’s like to compete, yet be a good teammate. He’s a twin, and one of five children. Gulbranson’s twin sister, Abby, is

finishing her freshman year at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo. She’s not a college athlete, but played four sports in high school.

“She’s always been by my side,” Gulbranson said.

Gulbranson comes from a professional family, his father Scott a doctor and mother Amy an engineer. The classroom is important to the Gulbransons, but the parents wanted the children to be well-rounded. Ben tried most of the traditional sports before settling on football and basketball heading into high school at Newbury Park in California, northwest of Los Angeles.

Gulbranson said about eighth grade, he believed college football was in his future. At Newbury Park, Gulbranson had a measuring stick and role model in quarterback Cameron Rising, who was two years older and on the radar of most college football programs. Rising eventually signed at Texas. (Rising is now at Utah.)

See Beavers, Page A11

SPORTS SHORT

OHA changes mask mandate for outdoor sports

Bend Bulletin

SALEM — The Oregon Health Authority has finally changed its mask rule for outdoor noncontact sports, announcing Monday, April 26, that masks do not need to be worn by athletes “competing in noncontact sports outdoors and maintaining at least 6 feet of distance from others and the other virus protective protocols.”

The change comes in response to Summit’s Maggie Williams’ school record-breaking, 800-meter-

run on April 21.

Williams broke the Storm girls 800-meter record in 2 minutes, 8.45 seconds, while wearing a mask. She collapsed at the finish, in complete oxygen-debt, according to Summit track and field coach Dave Turnbull.

“The Oregon Health Authority regularly reviews COVID-19 guidance based on medical evidence and evolving science. We are revising the current guidance on the use of masks outdoors during competition,” the April 26 statement from

the OHA said. “The guidance will allow people to take off face coverings when competing in noncontact sports outdoors and maintaining at least 6 feet of distance from others and the other virus protective protocols.”

“The exception will not apply while training and conditioning for these sports or for competitions. The exception will not apply before and after competing.

“As always, OHA will revise guidance as needed to protect public health during the pandemic.”



Pendleton’s Olivia Corbett hits the ball during a singles match against Ridgeview’s Kylee Rost in Pendleton on Monday, April 26, 2021.
Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian