

# EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

SATURDAY, MAY 1, 2021

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B1

## ONE OF THE BOYS

### Alyssa Luna earns a starting spot on Irrigon's baseball team

By ANNIE FOWLER  
East Oregonian

**I**RRIGON — When high school softball was canceled in the spring of 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Irrigon's Alyssa Luna shed a few tears.

This spring, the Knights simply did not have the numbers to field a softball team, but instead of feeling sorry for herself, Luna reinvented herself.

She joined the baseball team.

But it wasn't a matter of asking for a jersey and playing time.

"I wish it was that easy," said Luna, who is a catcher. "I joked with my boyfriend (Ryan Hussey) that I wanted to play. He said, 'Why not?' I told him I didn't want to step on his toes, but he encouraged me to do it. The first week was hard, but I'm glad I stuck with it."

Irrigon baseball coach Fredy Vera said he told Luna he had to think about it when she first asked to play.

"She contacted me, and she talked to the school," Vera said. "I thought on it a bit, and I thought if she is comfortable, she could play. She's a really good athlete and a really good student. Those are the kids you want on your team."

#### Getting her feet wet

The first day Luna attended prac-



Irrigon's Alyssa Luna poses for a portrait on the baseball diamond at Irrigon High School.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

tice, Vera laid down the law with his players.

"It was my first day and I was so nervous," Luna said. "Fredy told them if he heard anything of anyone mistreating me that there would be consequences. He was supportive of me. He's a first-year coach and has a girl on his team. He took a chance on me."

That's not to say Luna hasn't put pressure on herself to be an asset to the Knights.

"The first week of practice I was puking almost every day before practice because I was so nervous," Luna said. "Once I got on the field, I felt so comfortable with all of them and it made it more fun. It's such a different environment than softball. At the end of day, we have great teamwork. I do not regret it."

Vera already had his eye on a couple of guys to play behind the plate, but Luna was determined to show what she could do.

"Fredy asked if I played anywhere else," Luna said. "I said no. He told me I might not get that spot. When he told me that, it did not sit well with me. That pushed me. I knew the position. I told him he would be looking at more players now."

#### Learning the game

While Luna has played softball for many years, baseball is a whole other beast.

The field is larger, the pitchers

throw harder, the ball is smaller, and the distance from home plate to second base is 43 feet farther than it is in softball.

None of that deterred Luna.

"My uncle Leon (Luna) and his friend Cougar Kroske have helped me a lot," Luna said. "They both used to catch for Irrigon. I would not be where I am today without them. Before, I couldn't get the ball to second. Now I can get it there in one hop. It's intimidating sometimes, I'm not going to lie."

Hussey, who is a pitcher, has put in the time to help Luna adjust to the speed of pitches, and the different kinds of pitches coming from the mound.

"It was rough at first," Luna said. "Ryan had to stay and work with me. Honestly, I wanted to play, I wanted to do something I love, and I wanted to compete with him, which makes us both better athletes. He makes me a better player. Now that I am getting it, I am so excited for games."

Her hard work is not lost on Vera. "Honestly, I'm pretty surprised by how much she has improved from the start until now," he said. "She has transitioned pretty fast, which is a good thing. The ball is coming in a little faster and the bases are a lot longer. She has a really good work ethic and she is pretty vocal. She is always talking. She is the loudest one on the field, which is a good thing."

Even with all of her hard work, Luna didn't know if that would translate into playing time.

"I was expecting to play JV or cheering from the bench," she said. "When he told me I was starting

See Baseball, Page B2

### GIRLS SOCCER

## Pendleton goalie wins top IMC honor

By ANNIE FOWLER  
East Oregonian

**P**ENDLETON — The Pendleton girls soccer team went through some growing pains this spring, but the Intermountain Conference coaches saw a lot of promise in the Bucks' young players.

Junior Lindsey Pasena Little Sky was named the IMC Goalie of the Year.

"That was a huge honor for her," Pendleton coach Kiana Rickman said. "I know she was really excited. She saved our butts in a lot of games."

Sophomore Hadley Brown was named a first-team midfielder, while junior forward Reilly Lovercheck earned second-team honors.

Freshman Hailey Schmidt was named to the honorable mention team as a defender.

"Hadley had one goal for us, but she was a huge leader on the field," Rickman said. "She was the little engine in the middle of the field."

Lovercheck was the Bucks' top goal scorer, including a hat trick against Hood River.

The Bucks finished the



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

**Pendleton goalkeeper Lindsey Pasena Little Sky reaches to block a shot on goal during the second half against the Eagles. The Hood River Valley Eagles defeated the Pendleton Buckaroos 5-3 at Pendleton High School on March 30, 2021.**

season 1-9 overall, with their lone win a 6-0 victory over Crook County. Seven of their losses were by three goals or less.

Hood River Valley senior midfielder Mira Olson was named IMC Player of the

Year along with Redmond junior forward Dagne Harris.



Pasena-Littlesky



Brown



Lovercheck

### BOYS SOCCER

## Bucks have 5 players earn IMC honors

By ANNIE FOWLER  
East Oregonian

**P**ENDLETON — The Intermountain Conference coaches selected five Pendleton players to the all-conference team, led by senior defender Michael Flores.

Freshman forward Rene Ortega was named to the second team, along with senior defender Johann Velera-Vega.

Honorable mention honors went to senior midfielders Gabe Rodriguez and Jon Moreno.

"It's nice they are recognized by the coaches in the league," Pendleton coach Alex Erazo said of his players.

Ortega led the Bucks (2-5-1) with seven goals on the season.

"Rarely do you see a freshman start, let alone lead the team in scoring," Erazo said. "He has had to help lead the program as a freshman. He definitely rose to the occasion and helped us."

Marques Montanez of Ridgeview was named



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

**Pendleton's Michael Flores (14) gains control of the ball during the first half against the Panthers. The Pendleton Buckaroos defeated the Redmond Panthers 3-1 at Pendleton High School on March 18, 2021.**

Player of the Year, while Ridgeview's Jimmy Kim was named Coach of the Year. Hood River Valley's Andrew Mondragon was named Goalie of the Year.



Flores Valera-Vega

### SPORTS SHORT

## MLB: 9 teams reach 85% vaccination rate

Associated Press

**N**EW YORK — Major League Baseball says nine teams have had 85% of players, coaches and others with Tier 1 access receive their final dose of the coronavirus vaccine, allowing those clubs to ease some health and safety protocols.

Four of those teams have already begun relaxing some protocols after 85% or more of Tier 1 individuals reached full vaccination, meaning they are at

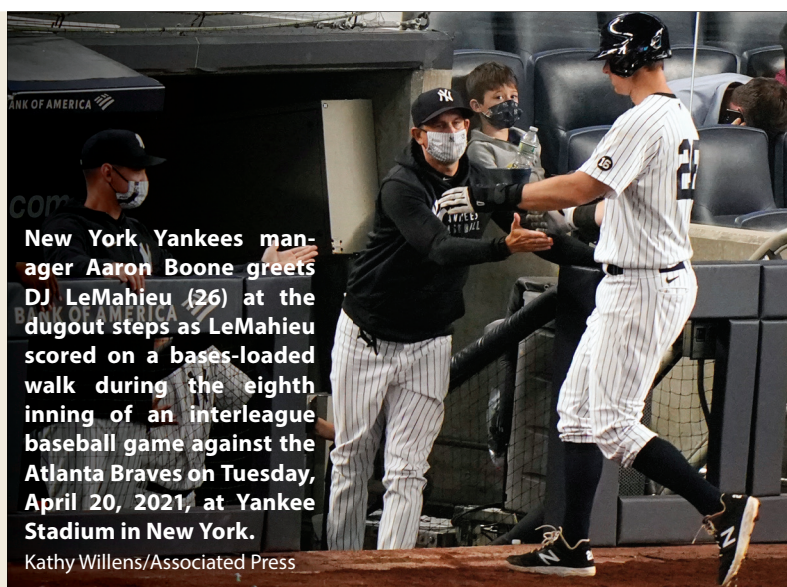
least two weeks removed from their final vaccine dose. Another five teams have surpassed the 85% threshold for vaccine injections within the past two weeks and can ease standards once that waiting period passes.

The league also said in a statement Friday that 81% of Tier 1 individuals are considered partially or fully vaccinated.

The statement did not say which teams had cleared the 85% threshold, but the New York Yankees and Detroit Tigers are

among them. Both clubs have eased protocols, and when they played Friday night, it was the first time this season neither team had to wear facemasks in the dugout.

MLB said it found four new positive tests this week (two major league players, two alternate site players) out of 11,547 tests conducted. So far this season, there have been 43 total positives out of 135,317 tests, a 0.03% positive rate. Twenty teams have had at least one person test positive during monitoring testing.



**New York Yankees manager Aaron Boone greets DJ LeMahieu (26) at the dugout steps as LeMahieu scored on a bases-loaded walk during the eighth inning of an interleague baseball game against the Atlanta Braves on Tuesday, April 20, 2021, at Yankee Stadium in New York.**

Kathy Willens/Associated Press