

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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A9

Oregon looks to restock secondary cupboard

Baton passed from NFL prospects to young talent

By RYAN THORBURN
Eugene Register-Guard

EUGENE — The five defensive backs the Ducks started in the Rose Bowl victory over Wisconsin on Jan. 1, 2020, have all left the nest and Oregon coaches are comfortable with the restocked secondary after several players gained experience during the truncated 2020 season and other young talents making strides during spring practice.

After Thomas Graham, Jevon Holland and Brady Breeze opted out last season, Mykael Wright became an all-Pac-12 cornerback, Jamal Hill made a name for himself at nickel with two interceptions in the Pac-12 championship game and safety Verone McKinley became “the general” of the unit.

The list of safeties competing for more playing time with Nick Pickett moving on includes Steve Stephens, Bennett Williams and Jordan Happle.

D.J. James is the early frontrunner to replace Deommodore Lenoir, but Trikkeze Bridges, Dontae Manning and Jaylin Davies have also impressed the staff.

“I’m very pleased with where we are as a unit right now,” cornerbacks coach Rod Chance said. “We’ve got a lot of guys that are going to step onto the field for the first time in their Oregon careers.”

“Obviously, we’ve been blessed to have had some of the defensive backs we’ve had here for the past

three or four years, but at the same time we’re very excited to see these young men put themselves in position to make plays.”

While opposing quarterbacks mostly avoided throwing in Lenoir’s direction after the senior cornerback opted back in for the 2020 season, Wright took advantage of all of the action by leading the Pac-12 with nine passes defended.

Chance acknowledged that the cornerback starting opposite Wright against Fresno State on Sept. 4 at Autzen Stadium should be ready to get tested early and often.

“I’m excited for the opportunity,” James said of possibly replacing Lenoir full time after getting limited snaps subbing in last season. “I feel I’ve been taught and coached into this position I’m about to acquire. I feel that I’m ready for it. My coaches will have me ready for it. I’m just going to take over the opportunity and enjoy it.”

Hill had 20 tackles, four passes defended and the two interceptions in six games played last season.

The 6-foot-1, 200-pound

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A season to remember

Haden Hyatt’s stellar pitching and spotless ERA has Heppner off to 8-1 start to the season

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

HEPPNER — Heppner is a football town, but this spring the baseball team is making people sit up and take notice.

The Mustangs are 8-1 heading into a doubleheader at Riverside on Saturday, May 8, largely in part to the work Hayden Hyatt has put in on the mound.

The senior, right-handed pitcher has thrown 30-2/3 innings over six games. He has given up nine hits, one unearned run, has walked 16 and struck out 40. He boasts a 6-0 record with a sterling 0.00 earned run average.

Hyatt’s performance has surprised himself and Mustangs coach Tim Wilkins.

“This is the first time I have had someone like this and I have been here five years,” Wilkins said. “It’s nice to have him. He’s always worked super hard, but his velocity has really improved over the past two years.”

The 5-foot-11, 180-pound Hyatt said the key to his success this season hasn’t just come from endless hours of work.

“I just have all the faith in the world in the guys around me,” he said. “I trust they will make plays. When I don’t have to worry about that, I can do my job better.”

Those guys include Jackson Lehman at first base, third baseman Toby Nation, Mike Jaca at second and shortstop Carson Eynetich. All but Nation have grown up in the program together.

“Toby just moved here this year from Oklahoma, but he is a solid player all around,” Hyatt said. “He has all my trust when I’m on the mound.”



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Heppner’s Hayden Hyatt (24) throws a pitch against the Rockets. The Heppner Mustangs defeated the Pilot Rock Rockets 6-4 at Pilot Rock High School on Monday, April 12, 2021.

No one has put a radar gun on Hyatt this season, and he’s not sure he wants to see those numbers. While he doesn’t baffle hitters with his speed, he has a couple of pitches that catch them off guard and freshman catcher Cameron Proudfoot calls a good game.

“One of my favorite pitches is my curveball, and my second favorite is my knuckle ball,” Hyatt said. “Cameron is learning and doing pretty well back there.”

Hyatt said he doesn’t keep track of his stats on a regular basis, but he is aware of his earned run average of zero.

“It’s such a surreal thing,” he said. “It’s definitely a one-of-a-kind thing.”

But it is something the Oregon School Activities Association keeps track of.

The lowest ERA for one season (a minimum of 50 innings) belongs to Rich Farthing of Corvallis High School, 0.11, set in 1969. Devin Muir of Days Creek is second at 0.12 (2010) and Jacob Fricke of Glide is third with 0.19 (2015).

There is a state-mandated pitch count of no more than 110 per day, and there are required days of rest. Hyatt has been able to keep his pitch count

down so that he can throw on Tuesday and again on Saturday. His season high is 99 pitches through six innings against Sherman on May 1.

Hyatt is one of five quality pitchers in the Mustangs’ stable, along with Nation, Jaca, Eynetich and Tucker Ashbeck. “We are deeper at pitcher than we have ever been,” Wilkins said. “Toby is close to Hayden velocity wise, but he’s not as accurate.”

While his performance on the mound is second to none, Hyatt still is a work in progress at the plate this season.

He is hitting .233 with two doubles and four RBIs, but the heavy hitting has been done by Lehman, Ashbeck, Jaca and Kason Cimmityotti.

“My play at the plate has been lacking for me, and it has been frustrating,” Hyatt said. “I’m working pretty hard in practice to improve on that.”

Wilkins said it’s just a matter of time before Hyatt gets his timing back.

“He has always hit really well and has had a high average,” Wilkins said, “but having a year off has affected everyone’s swing.”

It’s been more than six years since the Mustangs have had a winning season on the diamond. An 8-1 start is not something Hyatt foresaw.

“I can speak for the guys around me, they are surprised as well,” Hyatt said. “It’s taken high intensity, dedication and communication, which has been at an all-time high since I’ve been in high school. We put our nose to the grindstone this season, for sure.”

Hyatt also plays football for the Mustangs, but sports beyond high school are not in his plans.

“Baseball would be my No. 1 pick if I were to go to the next level,” he said. “I don’t have any offers, so I think I will stick with going to work.”

Before then, the Mustangs have six games remaining, and Hyatt has an opportunity to add his name to the OSAA record book.

OSAA

Heppner principal elected to board

East Oregonian

HEPPNER — Heppner Jr.-Sr. High School principal Matt Combe was recently elected to serve on the Oregon School Activities Association Executive Board.

The OSAA Executive Board is a 13-member board that sets policy for all member schools in the state. It is comprised of mostly school superintendents. Combe will be the only school principal on the policy making board.

Combe has served the past six years on the OSAA Delegate Assembly Board that is comprised of approximately 40 members from each conference or league in each classification (1A-6A) in the state.

The delegate assembly meets regularly and makes grassroots recommendations to the executive board on policy matters.

“I have been an advocate of athletics and extracurricular activities throughout my educational career,” Combe wrote in his candidate statement. “I have valued my time serving on the OSAA delegate assembly and would like to continue this work. My focus would be on positive working relationships to help the OSAA continue to function efficiently and effectively in enriching the educational experiences and opportunities for students.”

The OSAA is a nonprofit, board governed organization comprised of 293-member schools, both public and private. The mission of the OSAA is to serve member schools by providing leadership and state coordination for the conduct of interscholastic activities, which will enrich the educational experiences of high school students.

The organization, which was founded in 1918, sponsors 113 team and 426 individual event state championships for students competing in 19 interscholastic activities.



Combe

SPORTS SHORT

Welcome to Top 10, Melo: Elite NBA scoring list adds Anthony

By PAUL NEWBERRY
Associated Press

ATLANTA — Carmelo Anthony looked like he was all done just a couple of seasons ago.

Now, he’s part of a truly exclusive club in the NBA.

Welcome to the Top 10, Melo.

Anthony scored 14 points Monday night, May 3, in Portland’s 123-114 loss to the Atlanta Hawks, moving him past Elvin Hayes for 10th place on the career scoring list with 27,318.

“If you’re in the top 10 of anything of all time, it’s a special moment,” said Anthony, who is in his 18th NBA season and turns 37 before the month is out.

Anthony cruised past Hayes early in the second quarter, hitting a 3-pointer while getting fouled by Danilo Gallinari and knocking down the free throw to complete a 4-point play.

Anthony was fully aware of how many points he needed to surpass Hayes.

“I knew this moment,” he said. “I didn’t know those other moments — 15, 13, 11. But 10 is something I knew.”

It appeared Anthony was headed for a forced retirement after he played just 10 games during the 2018-19 season.

He parted ways with Houston, was waived by Chicago and didn’t hook up with Portland until

the next season was several weeks old.

Even though he went more than a year without playing a game, Anthony found new life and a new role with the Trail Blazers.

A starter his entire career, he is coming off the bench now, playing a supporting role to younger stars, players who still look up to him, such as Damian Lillard.

“Being in the top 10 in a really special accomplishment,” Lillard said. “For him, it’s probably a little more special. A lot of people counted him out and tried to finish him.”

During his time with the Trail Blazers, Anthony has passed nine players on the career scoring list.



Mary Altaffer/Associated Press, File

Brooklyn Nets forward Jeff Green (8) guards against Portland Trail Blazers forward Carmelo Anthony (00) during the second half of an NBA basketball game on Friday, April 30, 2021, in New York.