

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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COLLEGE SOCCER

SAVED BY SOCCER

BMCC's Kylie Baker turns to soccer after softball canceled for a second time

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Kylie Baker showed up in Pendleton in 2019 ready to play softball at Blue Mountain Community College.

The graduate of North Medford High School played on the Black Tornado's 2017 6A state title team, and was an All-Southwest Conference honorable mention selection as an outfielder her senior year. She was ready to lend her skills to the Timberwolves.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the following spring, the Timberwolves' season was canceled.

Undeterred, Baker waited until the spring of 2021 to get her college career on track. Once again, the season was shut down, but this time it was due to a lack of players.

At this point, Baker was unsure of her future. She'd lost two years of competitive softball, but not all was lost.

BMCC women's soccer coach Jordan Hillmick knew Baker had a soccer background, and asked her if she'd like to try out for the team.

"Coach reached out to me a few days before the second (softball) season was canceled," Baker said. "He was unsure if I would want to play, but I was game."

At her first practice, Baker told Hillmick she'd be rusty. She sold herself short.

"She was playing with our ball launcher, so I could see how she moved," Hillmick said. "Our girls' jaws just dropped. She's an incredible athlete."

Once the first practice was over, Baker wasn't sure how well she had done until the other players started talking to her.

"I wasn't even sure if I had had done anything comparable to the girls who were already there," she said. "Once they figured out I could play, they were happy I was there."

A forward, Baker has started five games and has one goal — the game winner against North Idaho on April 17.

The following week, BMCC goalkeeper Aeryn Elder went down with a concussion with 30 minutes left in a game against Spokane. The Timberwolves had a contingency plan, which had Baker playing in goal.

"She had said she played goalie before," Hillmick said. "Had Kylie not come to the team, we had another girl, but Kylie is the better option."

Baker stopped all eight shots that came her way in the 3-0 loss to Spokane.

She also was in goal for BMCC's 5-3



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Blue Mountain Community College's Kylie Baker kicks the ball during a home game on April 14, 2021, against Yakima Valley.

win over Treasure Valley on April 24, and again against the Chukars on May 12, finishing with 19 saves in a 6-4 victory.

"At 5-foot-9, she has presence," Hillmick said. "This was Kylie's time to shine. Our defense stepped up, but Kylie did everything naturally well. We had never practiced with her in goal. She stepped in and played well for us. She was a blessing in disguise."

Baker played soccer in high school through her junior year, but hadn't played goalie since her youth soccer days.

"I happened to be the only other player who had any experience," Baker said. "Everyone jokes about me in goal to be funny. I'm glad I was able to do that for them."

The Timberwolves have two games remaining — hosting Walla Walla on Wednesday, May 19, and a Tuesday, May 25, home game against Columbia Basin College.

BMCC (4-3-0) sits fourth in the East Division of the Northwest Athletic Conference.

"We can finish at best second, or no worse than fourth," Hillmick said. "A great turnaround from finishing eighth the past few years."

Elder might be ready to return to the

net for the last two games, which would return Baker to forward.

Changing course

While softball was her sport of choice, Baker doesn't regret returning to the soccer field.

"I'd played softball since I was 4 years old," she said. "I was really upset I had taken the step to play college softball, but was never given the opportunity to play. Playing soccer has allowed me to accept that, and has given me something to work toward athletically."

Baker already has committed to returning to BMCC for soccer in the fall, which was music to Hillmick's ears.

"It's super awesome to have a player like her," he said. "She's going to get some attention from other schools."

Baker had planned on spending two years at BMCC, and then move to Oregon Tech to finish her mechanical engineering degree. Just like her softball career turned to soccer, Baker is tinkering with her educational options.

"I want to evaluate other options career wise and not be too far behind if I switch," she said. "I'm studying mechanical engineering, but I'm not 100% decided if that is what I want to do."

Maher helps C of I to share of conference title

EOU's Hunter Nichols places second in 800 and 1,500

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

LA GRANDE — It didn't take long for Lane Maher to make a difference for the men's track and field program at College of Idaho.

Maher, of Pendleton, won the 400 hurdles in a personal best time of 53.72 seconds, and punched his ticket to nationals with an automatic qualifying time on Saturday, May 15, at the Cascade Collegiate Conference Championships.

Maher also anchored the 4x400 relay team to a come-from-behind, third-place finish to help the Coyotes win their first track championship since 1926.

"This was a huge step for our men's program," Coyotes coach Austin Basterrechea said in a news release. "Following the meet, I told the team that they faced more adversity this year than any other team or any other generation has dealt with. For our team to come together as a group and win a title — I can't put it into words — I am so proud of every one of the athletes."

The team title came down to the 4x400 relay, where Maher anchored the Coyotes to a time of 3:23.16.

Maher ran the final leg against EOU's Hunter Nichols of Heppner.

"I was five steps or so behind him when I got the baton," Maher said. "I was chasing him for 300 meters. When we hit the straightaway, he stumbled a bit. I went on the outside of him and outran him. I didn't know the point totals going in, but I knew in my head I had to beat him. Every point mattered, for sure. It feels pretty good, but it was a team effort."

College of Idaho trailed EOU 198-197 heading into the relay. The Coyotes earned six points to the Mountaineers' five to tie with 203 points each.

On Friday, May 14, Maher finished second in the 110 hurdles to Southern Oregon's Bryce Goggin. Goggin clocked in at 14.46 seconds, while Maher came in at 14.48, besting his own school record of 14.68.

Maher and Goggin also surpassed the 27-year-old CCC record (14.49) set by Alper Kasapoglu of Western Oregon in 1994.

"That was nice, but it will be his name (Goggin) on the board," Maher said.

Maher also was a member of the 4x100 team that placed fourth in a time of 43.22.

Maher hit the automatic qualifying times for the 110 hurdles and 400 hurdles for the 70th annual NAIA National Championships on May 26-28 at Mickey Miller Blackwell Stadium in Gulf Shores, Alabama.

Nichols had an outstanding meet of his own, placing second in the 800 meters in a time of 1:55.15. He also was second in the 1,500 with a time of 3:57.89.

Doc Porter

Porter, of Pendleton, will leave a lasting impression at Central Washington University after clocking a time of 48.53 seconds in the 400 meters at the Great Northwest Athletic Conference Championships on May 14-15 in Portland.

A graduate student, Porter finished second in the 400, and his time ranks 10th all time for the Wildcats. Before Saturday, May 15, Porter's best time in the 400 meters at CWU was 49.02.

Porter also ran a leg on the 4x100 team that placed second with a time of 42.59. Also on the team were Harrison Horwath, Zachary Davis and Bryan Sidor.

The Wildcats' 4x400 relay team of Braydon Maier, Spencer Solvberg, Gunner Vallatini and Porter was fifth at 3:23.45.



Maher



Porter

ON THE SLATE

TUESDAY, MAY 18

Prep baseball
2A/1A playoffs: Culver at Heppner, 3 p.m.
2A/1A playoffs: Pilot Rock at Lakeview, 2 p.m.

Prep boys basketball
Southridge at Hermiston, 7 p.m.
Irrigon at McLoughlin, 7:30 p.m.
Nixyaawii at Umatilla, 7:30 p.m.
Riverside at Stanfield, 7:30 p.m.
Condon/Wheeler at Echo, 7:30 p.m.
Sherman at Lone/Arlington, 7:30 p.m.

Prep girls basketball
Hermiston at Southridge, 7 p.m.

Irrigon at McLoughlin, 6 p.m.
Nixyaawii at Umatilla, 6 p.m.

Condon/Wheeler at Echo, 6 p.m.
Sherman at Lone/Arlington, 6 p.m.

Prep bowling
Hermiston at Southridge, 2 p.m.

College men's basketball
Big Bend at Blue Mountain, 7:30 p.m.

College women's basketball
Big Bend at Blue Mountain, 5:30 p.m.

College volleyball
Blue Mountain at Big Bend (2), 5 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 19

Prep boys basketball
Griswold at Umatilla JV, 6 p.m.
Baker at Nixyaawii, 7:30 p.m.

Prep girls basketball
Baker at Nixyaawii, 6 p.m.

Prep baseball
IMC playoffs: TBA at Pendleton, 4:30 p.m.

(loser out)
Prep softball
IMC playoffs: The Dalles-Crook County winner at Pendleton, TBD

College women's soccer
Walla Walla at Blue Mountain, 2 p.m.

THURSDAY, MAY 20

Prep boys basketball
McLoughlin at Riverside, 7:30 p.m.
Umatilla at Irrigon, 7:30 p.m.

Prep girls basketball
McLoughlin at Riverside, 6 p.m.
Umatilla at Irrigon, 6 p.m.

Prep wrestling
Walla Walla at Hermiston, 5 p.m.

Prep bowling
Hermiston at Kamiakin, 2 p.m.

College baseball
Walla Walla at Blue Mountain (2), 1 p.m.

SPORTS SHORT

No home regional for Oregon State

By JOE FREEMAN
The Oregonian

CORVALLIS — The journey to the College World Series will take place on the road for the Oregon State baseball team.

The NCAA Division I Baseball Committee on Friday, May 14, unveiled potential hosts sites for next month's NCAA regional matchups, and Corvallis was not included.

Oregon State, which remains in contention for a Pac-12 Conference regular season championship with three weeks left in the season, submitted a bid to host earlier this

spring and had hoped the program's blend of tradition and talent would be enough to land one of the 20 potential sites.

"When all that stuff comes out, we'll deal with it accordingly," coach Mitch Canham said last week. The NCAA's task for selecting hosts sites was as difficult as ever, because judging and ranking teams was as hard as ever.

"Certainly, this has been a unique season, but the committee is very appreciative of all of the schools that submitted bids to host," Jeff Altier, chair of the committee and director of athletics at Stetson, said in a release.

Normally, host sites are selected the day before Memorial Day, when the field for the 64-team tournament is announced. But the committee elected to announce predetermined sites three weeks early this season because of travel and safety concerns related to COVID-19. Of the 20 potential sites announced on May 14, the committee will choose 16 to host regional games. Eight of those 16 regional sites will then host super regionals. Oregon, Stanford and Arizona — three of the 20 sites announced on May 14 and all teams that are just ahead of Oregon State in the standings — could be host sites.



Leon Neuschwander/For The Oregonian, File

Mitch Canham's Oregon State baseball team bid to host an NCAA regional, but was not included on the list of sites revealed by the NCAA on Friday, May 14, 2021. The Beavers are still in contention for the Pac-12 title with three weeks remaining in the season.