

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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Headed to NCAA regionals



Zachary Lucy Photography/Contributed Photo

Dan Naughton, a 2018 Pendleton High School graduate, is pitching for the Gonzaga Bulldogs as they head to the NCAA tournament, where they open play Friday, June 4, 2021, at the Eugene regional.

Pendleton's Dan Naughton and Gonzaga to play LSU in Eugene regional

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

SPOKANE — Dan Naughton made a name for himself on the mound at Pendleton High School, and the Gonzaga Bulldogs took a chance that the right-handed pitcher would fit nicely into their bullpen.

The 2018 Pendleton graduate and the Zags are now headed to the NCAA tournament, where they open play Friday, June 4, at the Eugene regional.

"I'm excited to be a part of it," Naughton said Tuesday. "I think we knew going into the fall that we had a talented team. It all came together once the season hit."

Gonzaga (33-17) is the No. 2 seed in the bracket and will face No. 3 seed and six-time national champion LSU (34-22) at 7 p.m. Friday at PK Park.

Top seed Oregon (37-14) will play No. 4 seed Central Connecticut State (28-13) at 2 p.m. June 4.

The losers of each game will

play at 1 p.m. June 5, while the winners will face off at 7 p.m. The regionals are a double-elimination event.

The winner of the Eugene regional will play the winner of the Knoxville regional, which consists of Tennessee — the host school is ranked No. 3 in the nation — as well as Duke, Liberty and Wright State.

The Zags flew to Portland on June 2, then took a bus to Eugene. It's an easy trip compared to two of the teams in the regional.

"I feel bad for the Central Connecticut folks who have to travel to Oregon," Naughton said. "Same with the people with LSU. I'm not sure a lot of them have been to Oregon. But when you get to this point, you will play anywhere."

Gonzaga is 7-14 in seven previous NCAA regional appearances dating to 1976. This is the Zags' first NCAA appearance since 2018.

The Zags won the West Coast Conference title with a 10-0 victory over San Diego on May 27, but they lost their next two games to the Toreros, dropping their RPI to 27, dousing their hopes of hosting a regional.

"We all thought we'd be able to host, but we would have had to win all three against San Diego,"

Naughton said. "This is our first time playing LSU. We've gone down and played in Alabama, Mississippi and Texas, but haven't played LSU."

The Zags enter the game with a strong lineup.

Gonzaga's ace Alek Jacob (7-1, 2.82 ERA, 76.2 IP, 103K, 17 BB) is good to go, but the Zags still are without No. 2 starter Gabriel Hughes (broken hand).

Naughton, 21, is part of a rotation that has given the Zags support out of the bullpen. The 6-foot, 185-pounder has pitched 16.2 innings with a 3.24 ERA over the course of 11 games. He's allowed six runs, struck out 18 and walked eight. He also has not committed an error.

"I started one game, and I've closed out a few games," Naughton said. "I have mainly been coming out of the bullpen as a reliever. It's hard being on a team like Gonzaga. We are known for our pitching. It's a team full of really good pitchers. I'm thankful to be part of a team that has so much talent. I am happy to come in and chew up some innings."

The Zags' pitching staff has allowed an average of 4.6 runs per game, while the offense is putting up 6.3 run per game.

From Pendleton to the NCAAs

Naughton was barely a blip on the radar his first three years of high school, but his senior year he blossomed into one of the best baseball prospects in Oregon.

In the spring of 2018, Naughton set a Pendleton school record with 99 strikeouts in 56.1 innings pitched. He also had an ERA of 1.99. The Bucks finished the season 18-9, losing to Churchill 2-1 in the 5A state quarterfinals.

Naughton was the Columbia River Conference Player and Pitcher of the Year. He was named to the all-state first team and was ranked as the No. 5 prospect in Oregon by Baseball Northwest.

"I wasn't much of a college prospect my freshman, sophomore and junior years," Naughton said. "It was my senior year that I became a prospect and I realized I could have an opportunity to play the next four years. I knew I would have to have good grades, and I worked hard to get them."

Naughton, who is majoring in kinesiology, is as a sophomore at Gonzaga, despite this being his third year with the program.

"Because of COVID, I have two more years left," he said. "My goal is to be a starter."

Arkansas top seed in NCAA Tournament

Oregon lands at No. 14 seed, one of 5 Pac-12 teams in NCAA baseball tournament

By ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Arkansas was rewarded Monday, May 31, for its dominant run through the Southeastern Conference, landing the No. 1 national seed in the NCAA baseball tournament.

The Razorbacks (46-10) won all 10 of their SEC series and wrapped up their first conference tournament championship on May 30. After losing three straight games in March, they never lost consecutive games.

This is the third tournament in a row that Arkansas has been a top-eight national seed.

"It's still really special just to sit there and see your name called," coach Dave Van Horn said after his team gathered to watch the selection show. "Such a good season up to this point."

The 64-team tournament opens May 28 in 16 regionals. Winners advance to eight best-of-three super regionals. Those winners move on to the College World Series in Omaha.

The top eight national seeds host super regionals if they win their regionals.

The national seeds following Arkansas: Texas (42-15), Tennessee (45-16), Vanderbilt (40-15), Arizona (40-15), TCU (40-17), Mississippi State (40-15) and Texas Tech.

Texas has its highest national seed since it was No. 2 in 2010, and the program will be making its NCAA-best 60th appearance in the tournament.

Tennessee, at No. 3, will be hosting a regional for the first time since 2005, the year the Volunteers last advanced to the College World Series.



Butch Dill/Associated Press

Arkansas coach Dave Van Horn, center, celebrates with the team after defeating Tennessee in an NCAA college baseball championship game during the Southeastern Conference tournament Sunday, May 30, 2021, in Hoover, Alabama.

Vanderbilt, making its SEC-best 15th straight tournament appearance, will be going for its third national championship since 2014 after winning the title two years ago. There was no tournament in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Seeds nine through 16 are Stanford (33-14), Notre Dame (30-11), Old Dominion (42-14), Mississippi (41-19), East Carolina (41-15), Oregon (37-14), Florida (38-20) and Louisiana Tech (40-18).

The SEC led all conferences with nine teams in the field, followed by the ACC (8), Pac-12 (6), Big 12 and Conference USA (4) and Big Ten (3).

The last four teams selected were Alabama, Michigan, North Carolina and UC Santa Barbara. Baylor would be first in line to replace any team that can't play its regional because of failure to clear COVID-19 testing protocols.

Stetson athletic director Jeff Altier, the Division I Baseball Committee chairman, said varying scheduling strategies because of the pandemic made the task of selecting at-large teams extremely difficult.

Altier said the opinions of regional advisory committees weighed heavily in the decision-making. Typically the RPI, or rating percentage index, helps the committee decipher teams' comparative strengths, but it wasn't as useful this year because several conferences didn't play outside their leagues.

"It was an incredibly difficult year," Altier said. "Nobody experienced COVID before. We look at the RPI as a tremendous metric for us to help us evaluate, and in a year where you cannot play everybody across the conferences as typically you would do, it makes it difficult to choose."

EOU sets 2021 football schedule

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A full slate of football is back at Eastern Oregon.

After a shortened season in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mountaineers are set to play a 10-game season in 2021.

Eastern went 3-1 last season to claim a shared Frontier Conference title and finished the season ranked No. 21 in the NAIA rankings.

The Mountaineers will face only opponents from the Frontier Conference, three of which are home-and-aways with teams that they will play twice. Eastern opens its season on the road Saturday, Aug. 28, against Montana Tech, a team that did not play at all in 2020 but went 6-4 in 2019.

The first home game of the season at Community Stadium is an afternoon matchup against Montana Western Saturday, Sept. 4. The Bulldogs also opted out of playing in the 2020 season.

A big rivalry matchup takes place Saturday, Sept. 25, when the College of Idaho come to La Grande. The two teams are set to face off twice this year, with the second matchup taking place Saturday, Nov. 6, in Caldwell, Idaho.

Eastern heads to Ashland to face its in-state rival Southern Oregon Saturday, Oct. 2. The Mountaineers and Raiders will play again at Community Stadium for Eastern's final game of the regular season Saturday, Nov. 13. Senior day will be celebrated prior to the home matchup against Southern Oregon.

Eastern will also play a home-and-away against Carroll College, a team that the Mountaineers have defeated in the last six matchups. The Mountaineers are slated to play at home against Rocky Mountain College and on the road against Montana State-Northern in single matchups.

With in-person attendance at sporting events coming back across the country, it is likely that fans will be able to attend games this season. The EOU website states that season ticket information will be available at a later date.

ON THE SLATE

THURSDAY, JUNE 3

Prep boys basketball
Pendleton at Redmond, 6:30 p.m.
Weston-McEwen at McLoughlin, 7:30 p.m.
Stanfield at Umatilla, 7:30 p.m.
Ione/Arlington at Mitchell/Spray, 6 p.m.
Prep girls basketball
Redmond at Pendleton, 6:30 p.m.
Weston-McEwen at McLoughlin, 6 p.m.
Stanfield at Umatilla, 6 p.m.
Ione/Arlington at Condon/Wheeler, 6 p.m.

Prep wrestling
Hermiston at Richland, 5 p.m.

FRIDAY, JUNE 4

Prep boys basketball
Hermiston at Kamiakin, 7 p.m.
Hood River at Pendleton, 6:30 p.m.
Weston-McEwen at Pilot Rock, 7:30 p.m.
Stanfield at McLoughlin, 7:30 p.m.
Prep girls basketball
Kamiakin at Hermiston, 7 p.m.
Pendleton at Hood River, 6:30 p.m.
Weston-McEwen at Pilot Rock, 6 p.m.
Stanfield at McLoughlin, 6 p.m.

Prep wrestling
Banks, Irrigon, La Grande, Riverside at Pendleton, noon
College men's basketball
Blue Mountain at Spokane, 7:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, JUNE 5

Prep boys basketball
Richland at Hermiston, 5 p.m.
Enterprise at Echo, 11:30 a.m.
Griswold at Cove, 6 p.m.
Prep girls basketball
Hermiston at Richland, 1 p.m.
Enterprise at Echo, 10 a.m.
Prep wrestling
Richland, Hanford, Pasco, Chiawana, Kennewick, Kamiakin, Southridge, Walla Walla at Hermiston, 9 a.m.