

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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A7

A NATURAL

Hermiston's Riley Clark will continue track career at WOU

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — No one is sure what would have happened if Riley Clark would have stuck with track his freshman year of high school.

After waffling between track and baseball his first three years of high school, Clark finally settled on track his senior year. He finished the season with three district titles and a school record in the 4x100 relay.

"He is really a first-time track athlete," Hermiston track coach Emilee Strot said. "He chose baseball the past couple of years. This year, he sent me an email the day before track started. He said he wanted to come out and have some fun. I said 'I'll see you tomorrow.' I didn't know what he was capable of, but he is one of the most gifted athletes in Hermiston High School.

"It was such a weird season. We had seven weeks. We got to throw him into competition right away. He was able to instantly see his success and that motivated him the whole season. It's really scary where he could be."

Clark will take his talents to the next level at Western Oregon University, where he will major in education. He will be a preferred walk-on for the Wolves, but he's OK with that.

"They had budget cuts, but my marks will score them points in meets," Clark said. "I have to prove myself."

After visiting the campus and meeting the coaches, Clark said he felt at home with the WOU track program.

"I met with the coaches and it felt really great," he said. "After that visit, this was the school for sure. I talked to some other schools, but it didn't feel right. I felt like I had a second home at Western Oregon."

Clark lives with his grandparents, Debbie and Steve Clark, and even though his grandma doesn't want him to leave, she's come to terms with his decision.

"My grandma is a homebody, but I told her I needed to do this," Clark said. "It's easy to hop in the car and go visit. I love Hermiston, it will always be my home. I have a lot of family here."

A good decision

Clark turned out for track for a week his freshman year, then quit and joined the baseball team. His sophomore year, he went to school at Wilson High School in Portland, then returned to Hermiston.

He decided to give track another try his junior year, but the COVID-19 pandemic wiped out the season.

"My senior year, I thought I'd try it



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Hermiston's Riley Clark long jumps at the Mid-Columbia Conference track and field championship May 6, 2021, at Fran Rish Stadium in Richland, Washington. Clark took first with a jump of 22 feet 5½ inches.

again," Clark said. "I don't regret it. Not at all."

With his waffling between sports, Clark had had to prove his worth to the track program, but that didn't take long.

He placed first in the long jump and triple jump in every Mid-Columbia Conference meet, and the 4x100 relay team also won every race.

He had a personal best of 22 feet, 5½ inches in the long jump, and 44-6 in the triple jump. The 4x100 relay team, which also included Deryk Anderson, Thomas Reagan and DJ Wilson, won the MCC title with a school record time of 42.85 seconds at the MCC Championships.

"I'm glad he came out," Strot said. "We never would have known his potential. I'm glad he will get a chance to compete at the next level. He is still so raw. He has so much potential. The relay team we had this year, they had a special bond and pushed each other and kept each other accountable, which was important for Riley. For them to break that record at that high of a caliber meet is impressive."

The Bulldogs, with Clark on the anchor leg, had a slight edge during the 4x100 at the MCC Championships, and Clark had a couple of steps on Chiawana's Kobe Young when he took the baton.

Young, one of the top sprinters in the conference, could not catch Clark.

"There was no way Kobe Young was going to catch me," Clark said. "I knew we had to win. Kobe and I were exchanging words. When we passed the (long jump) pits, (coach David) Faa-

ete threw his hands up. I was so happy and excited. It was finally nice to race them and beat them. I love the fourth leg, there is so much adrenaline and the guys behind me just give you that push."

Clark was named to the Mid-Columbia Conference first team for all three events.

"For a lot of kids, they don't see the reward of working that hard," Strot said. "Kids will buy into it when they start to see success. He started to get a taste of that success and his potential. He just kept working hard."

Clark said he wishes there would have been a state meet so he could have had a shot at the school's long jump record of 22-7½, set in 2002 by Craig McAtee.

"It would have been awesome to go to state," Clark said. "This season was really fun. I stayed because I was doing so well, and the environment was getting better and better."

Clark, who also played football and basketball for the Bulldogs, has participated in one summer track meet, with a couple more on the schedule. He has been focused on jumping, but said he needs to get back on the track.

"I haven't been sprinting much," he said. "I had a meet this past weekend in Oregon City and I ran an 11.7 (in the 100 meters). I jumped a 21-5, and a 43-1¼, and won those events. It was kind of tough. I'm going to get back into the explosiveness. I just need to get back in the groove with it."

If this spring has shown anything, it won't take him long to get his groove back.

INTERMOUNTAIN CONFERENCE

Pendleton's Swanson, Rueber earn honors

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton boys basketball team went through some rough times this season, but the Bucks still were able to put quality players on the floor.

Senior Blake Swanson and sophomore Gauge Rueber were named to the Intermountain Conference honorable mention team by the conference coaches.

Cayden Lowenbach of Crook County was named Player of the Year, while the Cowboys' Jason Mumm was voted Coach of the Year by his peers. The Cowboys were 10-0 in IMC play and finished the season 16-0.

Swanson was a key returning player for the Bucks, who lost a large group of players to graduation in 2020.

A 6-foot-4-inch post player, Swanson led the Bucks with 9.8 rebounds a game. He also averaged 9.3 points and had 1.4 assists an outing.

"He hardly came off the floor," Pendleton coach Zach Dong said. "In my opinion, he outworked every big man in our league. He was our anchor defensively. He almost averaged a double-double, which is big time. He's definitely a nose-to-the-grindstone type of kid. I'm thankful and excited that he decided to play and stick with it."

Rueber, a 5-8 guard, led Pendleton in scoring with 10.4 points, three assists and 3.6 rebounds a game.

"He was asked to do a lot as far as being a sophomore and starting point guard, which normally wouldn't happen," Dong said. "He put us on his shoulders and carried us. He took that responsibility on and did a good job. Physically, he will grow and mature. He shot the ball fairly well with defenses keying on him. I'm excited to see what the next



Rueber

Swanson

INTERMOUNTAIN CONFERENCE BASKETBALL TEAM

Player of the Year:

Cayden Lowenbach, Crook County

Coach of the Year: Jason Mumm, Crook County

FIRST TEAM

Kevin Sanchez, sr., Crook County; Garrett Osborne, jr., Redmond; Skyler Jones, sr., Redmond; Jesse Sanchez, sr., Crook County; Emanuel Romero, jr., Hood River Valley.

SECOND TEAM

Ryan Asplund, jr., Ridgeview; Charlie Rawlins, sr., Redmond; Davis Yates, sr., Hood River Valley; Styles Deleon, so., The Dalles; Heaton Smith, sr., Crook County.

HONORABLE MENTION

Jeremiah Schwartz, so., Ridgeview; **Gauge Rueber, so., Pendleton;** Jack Siekkinen, sr., Hood River Valley; Rhett Haigh, sr., Redmond; **Blake Swanson, sr., Pendleton.**

two years brings with the experience he gained this year."

The Bucks finished the season 0-10 in IMC play, and dropped their district playoff game to Hood River for an 0-11 record.

"I really felt bad for our seniors not being able to get a win," Dong said. "We definitely got better as the season went on. We lost to Redmond by 30 the first time, then the second time it was by 16. We showed improvement."

ON THE SLATE

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Youth baseball
Spokane Tournament:
Pepsi Diamondjaxx vs. Clarendon Cardinals, 1 p.m.; Pepsi Diamondjaxx vs. West Val-

ley, 6 p.m.

Friday, July 2

Youth baseball
Spokane Tournament:
Pepsi Diamondjaxx vs. Yakima Valley Peppers, 8 a.m.; Pepsi Diamond-

jaxx vs. Gonzaga Prep,

1 p.m.

Saturday, July 3

Youth baseball
Spokane Tournament:
Pepsi Diamondjaxx vs. TBD

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