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Adrian Romero, left, works with Romeo Bombela, 9, during the free bilingual basketball camp Saturday, July 31, 2021, at A.C. Houghton Elementary School in Irrigon.

Heroes in basketball shoes

Bilingual camp in Irrigon a hit with players and parents

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

IRRIGON — When Nancy Rodriguez signed up her children Leah and Trey for the bilingual basketball camp in Irrigon, she failed to mention all the goodies that awaited them.

“Our family is a soccer family, but my daughter, Leah, is a basketball player,” the Boardman mom said. “When we were leaving, they said they could keep their basketballs. She was so excited. There aren’t really a lot of camps in the area, or ones that are free. In our community, we need more of that.”

There were 160 players who signed up for the free bilingual basketball camp Saturday and Sunday, July 31 and Aug. 1, at A.C. Houghton Elementary School, and the few stragglers who came at the last minute were welcomed as the camp directors did not turn anyone away.

The two-day event was a huge success, according to camp directors Adrian Romero and Mitch Thompson.

“It has gone really well,” said Romero during a break between age groups. “We had a lot of little ones. They have so much energy and are super excited. Their energy is contagious and makes for a good environment. Everyone has enjoyed themselves.”

Romero’s former Irrigon basketball teammates Fredy Vera, AJ Timpy, Anthony Landeros and Xavier Rambo helped with the camp, as did former Hermiston standout Jazlyn Romero, and former Hermiston sharpshooter Cesar Ortiz, now at Blue Mountain Community College.

“Jazlyn did a great job,” said Romero of his younger sister. “The kids know her. They were getting their picture taken with her.”

In addition to the camp, the players went



Marely Navarette, 11, right, and Yazmin Guzman, 11, toss up shots Saturday, July 31, 2021, during the free bilingual basketball camp at A.C. Houghton Elementary School in Irrigon.

home with a basketball, T-shirt and school supplies. They also could get a free haircut, which eight kids took advantage of.

“Everything was on point,” said Rodriguez, whose son Trey, 11, sat for a haircut. “The whole thing was positive and organized well. It’s awesome to be part of something like this.”

The camp was directed in English and Spanish to make everyone feel welcome.

“All of our instructions were in English and Spanish,” Thompson said. “Kids who only speak English, hopefully we were able to teach them some things in Spanish. All the kids were receptive to instructions in both languages.”

While the camp was a hit locally, freelance videographer Nick Goodwin from Omaha, Nebraska, was on hand to capture the uniqueness of the event.

“Mitch and I have a mutual friend,” Goodwin said of his involvement. “The plan is to make it a bigger project. They need

to have this story told and hopefully recreate something like this in other places. The enthusiasm is very real.”

Antonio Salinas, who grew up in Zillah, Washington, and now plays at Western Oregon University, worked with the kids at the camp on July 31, and left them with a piece of advice from one small-town kid to another.

“He told them they can ‘do what they want to do and go where they want to go,’” Goodwin said. “Even if you don’t end up doing anything in sports, you learn life lessons.”

With the success of the camp, Romero and Thompson are looking to come back next year.

“That is the goal, to have something like this for the community,” Romero said. “It shows you can grow up here and still do good things.”

There are heroes in every community, in Irrigon, they wear basketball shoes.

Masks may be back for indoor sports

OSAA waiting for more info from state health bosses

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Put your mask on. That is the word from the Oregon School Activities Association for indoor sports this fall.

The announcement came shortly after Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced on Thursday, July 29, that staff and students at K-12 schools will have to wear masks at school this fall.

The OSAA did say it is waiting for more information from the Oregon Health Authority, so nothing is set in stone.

The mandate relates to just volleyball in the fall, as football and cross-country are held outdoors.

“Nothing is certain yet,” Pendleton Athletic Director Mike Somnis said. “I know the governor put something out, and I’m sure it will happen sometime, but we have not gotten the directive yet.”

In Umatilla and Morrow counties, the number of COVID-19 cases has increased dramatically in the last half of July. The two counties had the highest number of positive COVID-19 tests in the state from July 11-22.

Longtime Riverside Athletic Director Clair Costello said whatever the Oregon School Activities Association and the Oregon Health Authority decide, they have to comply.

“I have no say,” Costello said. “It’s just whatever they say, we have to do. If the administration says we wear them, we wear them. It’s hard on the kids when they have to run, especially if they are asthmatic.”

Somnis agreed.

“I don’t think anyone wants to put these things back on when it comes to competition,” said Somnis, who noted that statewide athletic director meetings are set for next week and may offer some clarity.

While there has been mention of athletes wearing masks, neither athletic director has heard anything where fans are concerned.

“With all the new COVID outbreaks, I don’t know what we will do with fans,” Costello said. “Outside we will be OK. We are waiting on Morrow County to see what we have to do. There is no arguing, you just do what they tell you to do.”

The rules also may change athletic schedules, which were a jumble this past spring.

“In soccer and basketball, we have overnight trips, which we couldn’t have last season,” Costello said. “We already lost a football game in Week 3. We will have to see what happens there.”

For Hermiston, which plays in the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association, the mandate would be for home games only, as the WIAA has not issued any restrictions for fall sports.

The Bulldogs’ eight Mid-Columbia Conference partners — Chiawana, Hanford, Kamiakin, Kennewick, Pasco, Richland, Southridge and Walla Walla — are all in Washington.

SPORTS SHORT

Biles set to return for balance beam final

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

TOKYO — Simone Biles will at last return to Olympic competition Tuesday on Day 11 of the Tokyo Games.

The 2016 Olympic champion pulled out of competition a little over a week ago to focus on her mental health, but will return for the balance beam final in what will certainly be the highlight of NBC’s coverage.

Biles was the face of these Olympic Games leading into Tokyo until a case of the “twisties” sidelined the six-time Olympic medalist.

Biles, citing issues surrounding

air awareness, first pulled out of team competition after one event and said she needed time to focus on her mental health. She also skipped four of her five scheduled events, only announcing Monday that she’d return for the balance beam.

“We are so excited to confirm that you will see two U.S. athletes in the balance beam final tomorrow — Suni Lee AND Simone Biles!! Can’t wait to watch you both!” USA Gymnastics said in a statement.

The 24-year-old Biles won bronze on beam in Rio de Janeiro five years ago. Lee won the women’s all-around while Biles sat out, bronze in the uneven bars and was part of the group that won silver

in women’s team competition.

The women’s balance beam final will be streamed live on Peacock starting at 4 a.m. with an encore — along with the men’s horizontal bar final — during NBC’s primetime coverage beginning at 8 p.m.

The men’s horizontal and parallel bars also will be decided.

And it will be a big night at Olympic Stadium for American hurdlers Sydney McLaughlin and Dalilah Muhammad. They are expected to race each other for the gold in the 400-meter hurdles.

The women’s golf tournament begins with four Americans — Nelly Korda, Jessica Korda, Danielle Kang and Lexi Thompson — headlining the 60-player field.



Gregory Bull/Associated Press
Simone Biles, of the United States, center in blue, looks on with teammates during the women’s floor exercise in artistic gymnastics Monday, Aug. 2, 2021, in Tokyo at the 2020 Summer Olympics.