

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

THURSDAY, AUGUST 19, 2021

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Wildbill takes over Nixyaawii cross-country program

Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Nixyaawii Community School cross-country coach Weyekin Bill leads some of his runners Tuesday, Aug. 17, 2021, across a field near the Tamastlikt Cultural Institute on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Pendleton grad had 5 runners out for the first practice

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

MISSION — As a new coach, Weyekin Wildbill just hoped someone showed up for practice on the first day.

The Nixyaawii Community School cross-country team started practice Monday, Aug. 16, and five runners showed up. Wildbill is hopeful that number goes up once school starts.

"I had two girls and three boys the first day," said Wildbill, who accepted the coaching job Aug. 4. "I do know a lot of the kids, it's a matter of trust. For a second, it ran across my mind that no one would show up. I did have parents tell me their

kids would show up. That was reassuring."

Wildbill, 26, who works at the Nixyaawii Government Center, said he wasn't really looking for a coaching job, but when someone told him the job was open, he eagerly applied.

"It's always been something I wanted to do," he said. "It was the perfect opportunity. I really missed the sport. No better way to get back into it than coaching."

Leading the pack for the Golden Eagles is Saint Schimmel, who last year was the first Nixyaawii runner to qualify for the 2A/1A state meet.

Schimmel finished 69th at state in a time of 19 minutes, 57.83 seconds.

"It's hard to tell from the first practice, but he is motivated," Wildbill said of Schimmel. "I know his family quite a bit. They have quite the reputation as an athletic family."

Running is his thing

Wildbill, a 2014 graduate of Pendleton High School, ran cross-country and track for the Bucks.

"I qualified for state with the team in cross-country from my sophomore to senior year (2011-13)," he said. "I was a team captain. We were kinda hiding in Hermiston's shadow."

The same thing happened with track.

"I ran the 800, 1,500 and 3,000," Wildbill said. "I didn't

have such a good time in high school — those Hermiston kids were really fast."

From Pendleton, Wildbill ran at Clackamas Community College, Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and finally for Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, where he ran for two years.

With the Mountaineer cross-country and track and field teams, Wildbill competed in a number of events. He placed 41st at the CCC Cross Country Championships in 2019, and ran at the national meet in 2020. In 2019, he ran at the CCC Track & Field Championships, placing 14th in the 10K race.

"The 10K was the only race I was pretty decent at," he said. "Everything always



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

New Nixyaawii Community School cross-country coach Weyekin Wildbill, second from right, works out with his team Tuesday, Aug. 17, 2021, on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

seemed too short for my liking."

Wildbill has laced up his Brooks running shoes and joined the kids at practice. He figures it's better to show them what he's trying to get across than tell them.

"There are a lot of different aspects to consider," he said.

"Running as a pack, challenging them individually. I want to give them a positive outlet. I'm probably in the same shape they are. I have taken time off since college."

AP Top 25 Reality Check: How often do ranked teams flop?

By RALPH D. RUSSO
AP College Sports Writer

The preseason AP Top 25 is all about hope and optimism.

Reality Check is all about, well, being realistic. Sometimes the truth can be painful.

As has become tradition, the first AP Top 25 Reality Check of the season is a reminder that your promising college football team, newly minted with a cool ranking as it heads into the season, might turn out to be not as good as you and the poll voters thought.

Alabama is No. 1, followed by Oklahoma, Clemson and Ohio State in the poll presented by Regions Bank and released Monday.

From 2010-2020, on average, 9.5 teams that appeared in the preseason Top 25 finished the season unranked — about 38% of the picks. During that time, the fewest preseason ranked teams to finish outside the final Top 25 was seven in 2011; the most was 12, in 2010.

Even in an anything-but-

normal 2020 season played through the pandemic, the number of teams that started the season ranked only to finish unranked was a typical 10.

What was unusual about last season was the number of flameouts that came from the upper half of the preseason Top 25.

Over the last 11 seasons, 17 teams that started the season ranked in the top 10 finished unranked, just 1.5 per season. But last year, three top 10 teams — and five among the top 12 in the preseason rankings — did not finish the season ranked, led by 2019 national champion LSU, which was No. 6 going into last season.

As expected, most of the preseason ranked teams that fail to make the final Top 25 come from the bottom of the rankings. Teams ranked 21-25 in the preseason make up 27% of the teams (28 total) that finished unranked.

To put it another way, a little more than half the teams that started the season ranked between 21-25 from 2010-20,

finished unranked.

At the top of the poll? Only seven preseason top-five teams over that span have failed to be ranked somewhere in the final Top 25.

How likely is your team to be one of the disappointments?

No. 1 Alabama (13-0 last year)

Opener: vs. Miami in Atlanta, Sept. 4.

Reality check: The Crimson Tide have not finished ranked lower than 10th the last 13 seasons. There is no reason to believe this season's defending champion is vulnerable to an LSU-type tumble.

No. 2 Oklahoma (9-2)

Opener: at Tulane, Sept. 4.

Reality check: The Sooners have their most balanced team in years, with a quality defense to go with Lincoln Riley's usual potent offense. For whatever it's worth: Twice in the last 12 seasons (2009 and '14) Oklahoma has been a preseason top five team and finished unranked.

No. 3 Clemson (10-2)

Opener: vs. No. 5 Georgia

in Charlotte, North Carolina, Sept. 4.

Reality check: The Tigers are on a six-year run of top four finishes and haven't finished unranked since 2010. Coach Dabo Swinney's team has lost one ACC game since October 2017 and it's to a team (Notre Dame) that is not in the conference this season.

No. 4 Ohio State (8-1)

Opener: at Minnesota, Sept. 2.

Reality check: The Buckeyes have finished unranked just once since winning the national title in 2002, and have 16 top-10 finishes over that span. Coach Ryan Day has yet to lose to a Big Ten opponent in 16 games.

No. 5 Georgia (8-2)

Opener: vs. No. 3 Clemson, Sept. 4.

Reality check: The Bulldogs have been recruiting like the perennial playoff teams ranked in front of them and have four straight top-seven finishes under Kirby Smart. Georgia is a better bet to break its four-decade national title drought than to tank and finish unranked.

No. 6 Texas A&M (9-1)

Opener: vs. Kent State, Sept. 4.

Reality check: Heading into Jimbo Fisher's fourth season as coach, all signs are pointing in the right direction for the Aggies. But A&M has only finished the season ranked five times this century and hasn't had consecutive top-10 finishes in 27 years.

No. 7 Iowa State (9-3)

Opener: vs. Northern Iowa, Sept. 4.

Reality check: This whole ranked in the top-10 thing is new and different to the Cyclones. Iowa State finished last season ranked for just third time in program history. Can Matt Campbell's program continue to outperform its DNA?

No. 8 Cincinnati (9-1)

Opener: vs. Miami, Ohio, Sept. 4.

Reality check: The Bearcats have finished ranked each of the last three seasons under coach Luke Fickell, improving each season. They're loaded for another run in the American Athletic Conference, with nonconfer-

ence games at No. 17 Indiana and No. 9 Notre Dame likely to determine just how high they can go in 2021.

No. 9 Notre Dame (10-2)

Opener: at Florida State, Sept. 5.

Reality check: The Fighting Irish have finished the season ranked four straight seasons. The last time that happened was when Lou Holtz's teams ended seven straight seasons ranked from 1987-1993.

No. 10 North Carolina (8-4)

Opener: at Virginia Tech, Sept. 3.

Reality check: Coach Mack Brown tries to make it two straight seasons with a ranked finish for the Tar Heels. That hasn't been done in Chapel Hill since the final two seasons of Brown's first stint at UNC in 1996-97.

No. 11 Oregon (4-3)

Opener: vs. Fresno State, Sept. 4.

Reality check: There has been a lot of buzz around the Ducks because of the way

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SPORTS SHORT

NCAA investigating Nebraska's storied football program

Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska announced Wednesday, Aug. 18, that the NCAA is looking into its football program amid allegations Cornhuskers staff improperly used analysts and consultants with the knowledge of coach Scott Frost and even moved workouts off campus last year when such activities were banned during the pandemic.

Alberts confirmed the investigation first reported by The Action Network while Frost said any work-

outs were approved by his superiors.

"Everything we did through COVID was in the best interest and health of our players in mind and everything we did was approved by athletic department administration and campus administration," Frost said after practice.

Citing unidentified sources, The Action Network report said Nebraska has "significant video footage" confirming practice violations occurred in the presence of Frost and other assistants.

Alberts said the investigation started before his hiring was announced July 14 and that he found out about it after he started.

"We thought it was important the two of us come out and validate what you all have read on the internet and the reports that are out there nationally," Alberts said.

The NCAA has interviewed Frost, current and former staff members, administrators and football players, and Frost has hired an attorney. The alleged violations occurred in the last 12 months.

"We want you to know we have complied 100% with the NCAA, been very collaborative in our approach with them in terms of all of their investigation," Alberts said. "We will continue to do whatever the NCAA has asked us to do. Our coaches, including coach Frost, have done a great job and have been very accessible in working with the NCAA as we've worked through these allegations."

Alberts said he couldn't comment further because of the ongoing investigation.



Nati Harnik/Associated Press, File

Nebraska head coach Scott Frost listens to a question March 9, 2020, during a news conference on the first day of NCAA college football spring practice in Lincoln, Nebraska. The NCAA is looking into allegations that Nebraska's football program violated pandemic rules about practices.