

# EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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## Bull riding the Wright way



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Stetson Wright, of Milford, Utah, is bathed in the afternoon sun Thursday, Sept. 16, 2021, as he rides Longmire for 87 points on the second day of the Pendleton Round-Up.

## Work on gym displaces Pilot Rock team

The Rockets have played every game on the road this season

By ANNIE FOWLER  
East Oregonian

PILOT ROCK — Danielle Baleztena's volleyball team is paying the price as the Pilot Rock gymnasium is getting much needed improvements.

The Rockets have been forced to play all of their games on the road, and practice has been a comedy of errors.

"It's been very challenging," said Baleztena, whose team has been practicing at the middle school gym, which doubles as the cafeteria. "We have JV and varsity practicing together in small quarters. The ceiling is short, the net is not regulation height. It's either this or the grade school, which is worse."

With a low net, the players do not get the proper training for attacks or serving.

"It does make a big difference," Baleztena said. "The net is not the right height, the serves are off, the hits are off. They do awesome on this net,



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Construction equipment and protective sheeting line the gym Thursday, Sept. 10, 2021, at Pilot Rock High School amid renovations to the school.

heck I could jump up and hit off this net. We do see it in the games. When we scrimmage, we just play the ball off the ceiling. We are challenged with the amount of kids we have. We have 15 for two teams. Their heads are still in it, and their hearts are still in it."

The Rockets are 1-7 overall and 0-2 in Blue Mountain Conference play.

### Improvements are needed

The school received a seismic grant awarded by the state of Oregon for about \$2.5 million in spring 2019. The project will reinforce the exterior walls.

"Our gym is in pretty good shape,

but we are also getting a new weight room and concession stand," Pilot Rock Athletic Director TJ Presley said. "The public restrooms and access to them will be improved."

The gym has been closed to the student-athletes since the beginning of August. The volleyball team is hoping the construction work will be done so they can at least play a couple of matches at home.

"There have been no summer workouts and no official practices so far," Presley said. We are looking to get it back for the week of Oct. 12.

Our last three league matches (against Heppner, Grant Union and Union) are scheduled for home, but those schools are prepared to host if need be. It's been pretty hard on our girls."

The seismic project is part of the improvements the school's campus is getting.

A \$12 million bond, passed by Pilot Rock voters in November 2020, will fund a variety of projects, including school safety, deferred maintenance, a new gym (though the original gym will remain the main gym) and more.

Companies working on the project include McCormack Construction as the contractor, Straightline Architecture as the architect and ZCS Engineering and Architecture for the seismic projects.

The gym also will get a new paint job inside, a new roof, and the team locker rooms will be remodeled.

"It's going to be great," Presley said. "Part of the bond project will be adding a second gym. Once we get the gym back, we anticipate no interruptions for basketball season."

## Riverside back on track after 'payback' victory

Pirates set the tone by beating their nemesis OES

By JERRY ULMER  
OSAAtoday

BOARDMAN — Since winning the 3A/2A/1A boys soccer title in 2017, Riverside's path to another championship has been blocked by its nemesis, Oregon Episcopal School.

The Pirates had strong teams, but lost to OES in the 2018 semifinals and 2019 quarterfinals. They even dropped nonleague games to the Aardvarks in both seasons.

So Riverside — which didn't meet OES in the COVID-19-shortened spring schedule — took great satisfaction when it opened the season Aug. 27 with a 3-1 home win over the Aardvarks in the state runners-up in 2018 and 2019 and the No. 1 team in the OSAAtoday preseason 3A/2A/1A coaches poll.

"A lot of our guys were freshmen and sophomores those years, and now that they're seniors, it's kind

of like payback time," said Riverside coach Jose Duenas, whose team is No. 4 in the coaches poll. "We were ready. We knew we couldn't put our guard down at any minute because OES is OES."

It was the perfect way to start a season filled with promise for the Pirates, who improved to 4-0 after beating Portland Christian 8-0 on Sept. 14.

"We felt like all the hard work that they've been doing in the off-season on their own, and a lot of conditioning, that whole week we grinded, was for one reason, and that was to win," Duenas said.

The Pirates graduated high-scoring forward Gerardo Lopez, but have plenty of experience with nine seniors on their roster, including five four-year varsity players in midfielders Adair Rodriguez, Erick Zavala, Diego Magana and Jose Napoles and defender Humberto Sanchez.

The attack is adjusting to the loss of Lopez.

"We lost a really good forward up top, but everybody stepped up," Duenas

said. "As a coach, that's what you want. You want your full team focused and playing as one. I think losing him, it was like a silver lining."

Senior midfielder Pablo Claustro scored twice and freshman forward Darek Castaneda had a goal in an earlier win over OES. Napoles and sophomore forward Wyatt Browne scored as Riverside beat McLoughlin, avenging a loss from the spring. Sophomore Juan Medina was the goalkeeper in both matches.

Sanchez anchors a defensive line that includes Benny Sanchez and Ivan Franco, seniors who joined the team in the spring after not playing since youth soccer.

"They were really rusty," Duenas said. "They put in the work out of the season on their own, and they sharpened up their tools, and right now they're at a really good level."

Riverside will play at two-time defending state champion Catlin Gabel on Sept. 18. The Eagles are ranked No. 2.



Kathy Aney/  
East Oregonian  
**Jose Napoles (21), of Riverside, gets by De La Salle defender Alexander Rivera-Morena during a 2019 state semifinal game. Napoles is one of nine seniors on this year's roster.**

### ON THE SLATE

**Saturday, Sept. 18**

**Prep cross-country**  
Hermiston at Oregon City Invite, 11:30 a.m.

**Prep volleyball**  
Umatilla, Stanfield at Riverside Tournament, 10 a.m.

**Girls prep soccer**  
Baker at Riverside, 1 p.m.

**Prep boys soccer**  
Riverside at Catlin Gabel, 1 p.m.

**College men's soccer**  
Blue Mountain at Columbia Basin, 2:15 p.m.

**College women's soccer**  
Blue Mountain at Columbia Basin, noon

**Monday, Sept. 20**

**Prep volleyball**  
Walla Walla Valley Academy at Weston-McEwen, 4 p.m.

**Prep boys soccer**  
Baker at Pendleton, 4 p.m.

**Tuesday, Sept. 21**

**Prep volleyball**  
The Dalles at Pendleton, 6:30 p.m.

Eisenhower at Hermiston, 7 p.m.

Pilot Rock at Stanfield, 6 p.m.

Ontario at McLoughlin, 6:30 p.m.

Irrigon at Umatilla, 5 p.m.

Riverside at Columbia White Salmon, 6:30 p.m.

Griswold at Nixyaawii, 5 p.m.

Condon at Echo, 5 p.m.

Ione/Arlington at Bickleton, 5 p.m.

**Prep girls soccer**

Chiawana at Hermiston, 7 p.m.

McLoughlin at Umatilla, 3 p.m.

**Prep boys soccer**

McLoughlin at Umatilla, 6 p.m.

**Prep slowpitch softball**

Sunnyside at Hermiston (2), 4 p.m.

**Wednesday, Sept. 22**

**Prep cross-country**

Hermiston at MCC meet in Walla Walla, 4 p.m.

**College volleyball**

Blue Mountain at North Idaho, 6 p.m.

**College men's soccer**

Treasure Valley at Blue Mountain, 4:15 p.m.

**College women's soccer**

Treasure Valley at Blue Mountain, 2 p.m.

**Thursday, Sept. 23**

**Prep volleyball**

Pilot Rock at Heppner, 5 p.m.

Crook County at Pendleton, 6:30 p.m.

Walla Walla at Hermiston, 7 p.m.

Weston-McEwen at Union, 5 p.m.

Stanfield at Enterprise, 5 p.m.

La Grande at Irrigon, 5 p.m.

Umatilla at Riverside, 6 p.m.

Nixyaawii at Cove, 6 p.m.

Mitchell/Sprat at Ione/Arlington, 5 p.m.

**Prep girls soccer**

Walla Walla at Hermiston, 7 p.m.

Redmond at Pendleton, 4:30 p.m.

**Prep boys soccer**

Pendleton at Redmond, 4:30 p.m.

**Prep slowpitch softball**

Hermiston at Eisenhower (2), 4 p.m.



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