

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Frustration. Heartbreak. Limitations. Safety. Confusion. Those and more words came from area coaches discussing what it is like to keep their teams on the field or court during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's been more than 18 months since the first wave of COVID-19 shut down sports in the spring of 2020. Athletes lost their entire baseball, softball and track and field seasons.

Come fall, Friday nights were missing football. High school sports were shuttered until after the new year. When they were allowed to return, there were limitations, mask mandates and contact tracing.

"It hasn't been easy, and it has been frustrating," said Dennis Stefani, who coaches football and boys basketball at Ione/Arlington. "It's almost taken me down a couple of times. It's been hard to stay positive. Last year, the kids got deprived so badly. You do what you can do. The state (1A basketball) tournament in Baker was nice. We didn't go with all of our starters because parents were worried, but every team was like that."

Football got moved to the



Hermiston head coach David Faeteete celebrates Samuel Cadenas' punt block touchdown and calls out a plan for the point after attempt Friday, Oct. 8, 2021, during a 27-14 loss to the Southridge Suns in Hermiston. Faeteete is among the Umatilla County high school coaches to get vaccinated as a way to protect his players.

start of spring, and traditional spring sports finished off the school year, with some teams playing deep into June.

On top of that, students

were forced to do most of the school year on Zoom, which wasn't an easy task in small communities with limited internet access.

"Last year was hard,"

said Hermiston football coach David Faeteete, who also teaches social studies at the high school. "I was just glad this year we were able to start in the building. This

is the most participation we have had whether it be groups, clubs or sports. Kids desire to be social. COVID, as a coach and as a teacher, was tough for everyone. You

are trying so hard to do stuff for the kids because they need it. The mental health of kids took a huge dive."

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SPORTS SHORT

Portland Trail Blazers reportedly decline trade deal for Ben Simmons

By AARON FENTRESS
The Oregonian/OregonLive

PORTLAND — The Portland Trail Blazers have turned down a trade proposal that would have sent CJ McCollum and multiple draft picks and pick swaps to Philadelphia for disgruntled All-Star forward Ben Simmons, according to a report from Shams Charania of The Athletic.

According to Charania, the 76ers offered up Simmons for McCollum, three first-round picks and three pick swaps but the Blazers said no.

Simmons, upset by how he

perceived the way the 76ers treated him following his performance during the team's Game 7 loss to Atlanta in the second round of the NBA playoffs, has declared that he will not report to training camp, which began last week.

Simmons has been a no-show to camp and has demanded a trade. For much of the summer, Simmons was linked in trade rumors with Portland either for Damian Lillard or McCollum.

Neil Olshey, Blazers president of basketball operations, has made it clear that he has no intentions of trading Lillard. McCollum, on the other hand,

is believed to be more attainable but only in the right deal.

Simmons would certainly be an interesting fit with the Blazers. He would provide defense, size (6-foot-11), playmaking ability, rebounding and would elevate the team's transition game. However, Simmons' shooting issues are well-documented.

McCollum, on the other hand, is one of the league's best all-around scorers and was on an All-Star trajectory for the first time in his career last season before a broken foot sidelined him for 25 games.



Sean Meagher/The Oregonian
CJ McCollum looks on as the Portland Trail Blazers open the preseason on Monday, Oct. 4, 2021, against the Golden State Warriors at Moda Center, Portland.

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