

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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Peal will throw for George Fox



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Hodgen Distributing's Blane Peal throws a pitch July 6, 2021, against the Columbia Gorge Hustlers at Bob White Field in Pendleton. Peal recently signed a letter of intent to play baseball at George Fox University, Newberg.

Pitcher is school's lone first-team all-state player since 2014

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

ATHENA — Blane Peal is a three-sport athlete at Weston-McEwen High School, but his first love is baseball.

The senior right-handed pitcher recently signed a letter of intent to play baseball at George Fox University, Newberg, to continue his career on the mound.

"I'm very excited," Peal said. "They are a good engineering school, which is what I was looking for. I met with their coach (Kevin Kopple) and he was a really super guy. We hit it off. It (George Fox) filled all the boxes I wanted. It was the perfect situation."

There is so much to like about Peal as a player and a student. He is a 4.0 student and will receive an academic scholarship from the school.

On the field, Peal can pitch, play shortstop and hit the heck out of the ball.

"This will be a good thing for him," TigerScots coach Shawn Pierce said. "He has a bright future. He is one of those kids — not just the athlete, but the human being that comes with it. No way any college coach would talk to him and say, 'I don't want that kid.'"

Peal was a first-team Blue Mountain Conference selection, and a first-team 2A/1A all-state player his junior year. He is the school's lone first-team all-state player since Tyler Simmons in 2014, according to Pierce.

Weston-McEwen finished the modified spring season with a 6-7 record, but handed Dufur its first loss, 3-0 on May 1. Peal picked up the win in that game, allowing one hit and striking out 11.

On the year, Peal hit .630, with 10 doubles, three triples, four home runs, 23 RBIs and 22 runs scored. In 54 plate appearances, he only struck out three times.

He pitched 29.2 innings. He gave up seven hits, four earned runs, struck out 59, walked 14 and had an ERA of .94. He finished with a 4-0 record.

"His baseball numbers are ungodly," Pierce said. "I'm very proud of him. He works super hard and he means a lot to me. He's a great kid."

Peal said he will be pitching at George Fox. He said they did not discuss whether he would see any action at the plate.

"Pitching has always been the most enjoyable part of baseball for me," Peal said.

The Bruins are a program steeped in history. They won the 2004 D-III national

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Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Hodgen Distributing's Blane Peal fields the ball as a River City Athletics player slides into second base on July 19, 2021, at Bob White Field in Pendleton. Hodgen won the first game 13-11 and lost the second 9-7.

Lee Insko remembered for a legacy of compassion

EOU coach had an impact on his former players

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Lee Insko led Eastern Oregon University to many triumphs in the athletic arena during his 14 seasons as a head coach for the Mountaineers. But along the way Insko did much more than win.

Insko, who died Nov. 16 at Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, at age 86, also taught life lessons so timeless and enduring that some of his players did not fully appreciate them until decades later.

"I never realized the impact he had on my life until I got older," said Greg Oveson, of Wallowa.

Oveson played for Eastern from 1970 to 1973, during the first half of Insko's 10-year tenure as Eastern's head football coach, which ran from 1968 through 1977.

Oveson went to become an educator and high school coach. He said there have been many instances in which he has encountered issues in coaching and thought back to how Insko handled them. He remembered the compassion Insko showed



Eastern Oregon University/Contributed Photo

Lee Insko served as a coach at Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, for 14 years and later was named the dean of EOU's distance education program. He died Nov. 16, 2021, at the age of 86.

his players and tries to replicate it. Oveson also recalled how Insko balanced being a competitor without having a triumph at all costs attitude.

"He loved to win, but wanted to do it right, with hard work and intensity," Oveson said of Insko, who later became an EOU dean and helped jump start Eastern's ground-breaking distance education program.

The highlights of Insko's gridiron coaching career at Eastern included a 21-19 upset of national power Carroll College at Helena, Montana,

in 1974. It was the Fighting Saints' only home loss that season, its first in Helena since 1972.

Insko stepped down as Eastern's football coach in 1978 to become the Mountaineers' head men's basketball coach. He guided the men's hoopsters for the next four seasons, winning 54 games in the process.

His cast of roundball players included Emmett "Rodney" Roberts who played for the Mountaineers from 1978 to 1980.

"He was one of the most kind hearted men I've ever met in my

life," Roberts said. "He had a heart of gold. Whether you were on the varsity or the junior varsity, he was concerned and showed compassion. He was such a blessing in our lives."

Roberts came to Eastern from Bowie, Maryland.

"I was a long way from home but I never felt alone because coach always made sure I was OK," Roberts said.

The former EOU player returned to La Grande earlier this year to visit Insko and his family.

"I felt like I was their son because of the way they treated me," Roberts said.

Gary Vaughn of Pendleton, who played football for Insko in the early 1970s, was struck by how Insko treated all of his players the same regardless of their talent level.

"Lee Insko was always one of my favorite coaches because every one of his players really mattered to him and it always showed," Vaughn said. "Lee didn't care if you were the star or the last man on a roster, you were going to be coached hard and taught the game. His humor, decency and kindness was always on display."

Vaughn, who said Insko won several regional coach of the awards, later served on his coaching staff.

"When I coached for him, he expected the same from his assis-

tants, how we all treated and cared for each other was very important to him. He became family and your players were like family," Vaughn said.

Insko later served as dean of Eastern's distance education program for eight years after ending his coaching career at EOU in 1982. Dixie Lund, who worked under Insko while he led Eastern's distance education program, credited Insko with doing a remarkable job furthering the development of the distance education program. The program was one of the first in the nation to allow students to earn a degree without attending classes on a college campus. Today, it remains one of the most successful distance education programs in the region.

Lund also credited Insko with being a remarkable mentor for her.

"I just had so much respect for everything about him," Lund said. "He was a role model for the rest of us to follow."

She said Insko urged her to earn a doctorate degree, which she later did.

"That was the best advice anyone could have given me," Lund said.

Still she vividly remembered how concerned Insko was about the

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