

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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A11

Brown finishes sixth in world standings

Baker City steer wrestler places in five rounds at NFR

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

LAS VEGAS — Jesse Brown was waiting for that one big run at the National Finals Rodeo, and it came in Round 9 on Friday, Dec. 10.

The Baker City steer wrestler was one of four men who took down their steers in 3.9 seconds to share first place in the round and pick up a check for \$18,941.

Also in that group of steer wrestlers were Stetson Jorgensen, Stockton Graves and Tyler Waguespack.

On the victory lap, the steer wrestlers doubled up on horses. Jorgensen rode with Brown.

"That was good," Brown said. "That was pretty funny. I'm glad I didn't fall off."

Brown did not place in Round 10 on Dec. 11, which

left him fifth in the average, which was worth another \$23,513. He finished 15th last year.

Will Lummus finished first in the average (43 seconds on 10 runs) to win the NFR title, but Waguespack won the world title.

Brown went into the NFR sitting second in the world standings behind Jacob Talley, who ended up third. Brown, making his second trip to the NFR, finished sixth with \$165,061.

"Every year I have been doing this, it's dang sure not where I want to be," Brown said. "This is my best year so far. Last year was a bit different with COVID."

Over the course of 10 rounds, Brown placed in five. He tied for fifth in the first round, was fourth in the second round, sixth in the sixth round, tied for sixth in the eighth round, and tied for first in the ninth. He earned \$62,675 for his efforts.

The 2022 season has already begun, and Brown will be back on the dusty trail in January.

"We have already kind of started," he said. "I have gone to three rodeos so far. Denver and Odessa (Texas) are coming up in January."

Stetson Wright, who won the Pendleton Round-Up all-around, saddle bronc and bull riding titles, won the world all-around title the night of Dec. 11 with a record \$585,850.

It's Wright's third all-around title in a row, and he broke Trevor Brazile's Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association record for most money won in a season at \$518,011, which he accomplished in 2015.

Wright also won the world saddle bronc title, edging his older brother Ryder by \$1,187.

Sage Kimzey became a seven-time world champion in bull riding, and needs just



Rod Connor/Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association

Baker City's Jesse Brown takes down his steer in 3.9 seconds in Round 9 of the National Finals Rodeo on Friday, Dec. 10, 2021, in Las Vegas. Brown tied for first in the round with three other steer wrestlers.

one more to tie Don Gay's record of eight.

Also winning world

titles were Kaycee Feild (bareback), Caleb Smidt (tie-down roping), Jordon

Briggs (barrel racing), and Kaleb Driggers and Junior Nogueira in team roping.

THE RIGHT PLACE

Hermiston's Vertrees signs letter of intent to play at BMCC

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Grace Vertrees has put her heart and soul into volleyball during her four years at Hermiston High School.

Her hard work has paid off with an offer to play volleyball at Blue Mountain Community College, Pendleton.

Vertrees recently signed her letter of intent with the Timberwolves, and is excited to begin her college career.

"I got to go over there in October and play with them," Vertrees said. "The intensity level was super high. I thought I could rise to their level and play with them. It was great. I was in contact with a few other schools, but I was only serious about Blue Mountain."

Vertrees wasn't looking to go to a four-year college right out of high school, and she liked what BMCC had to offer.

"I like her (Ceanna Larson) coaching style so much, and I felt a good connection with the girls," Vertrees said. "There are so many options for recruiting going to a junior college first. I will get more playing time at a junior college, which allows me room for improvement and growth."

A 5-foot-10 outside hitter, Vertrees was an honorable mention selection in the tough Mid-Columbia Conference. She finished her senior season with 129 kills, eight blocks, 87 digs and 30 service aces.

The Bulldogs got a new coach in Megan Bunn in the fall. She is the third head coach Vertrees has played for at Hermiston.

"I really like her," Vertrees said.

The Bulldogs moved into the Mid-Columbia Conference when Vertrees was a freshman. She said the learning curve was steep.

"We were right there in the Tri-Cities facing the big dogs as freshmen," Vertrees said. "That was tough."

During her junior year, when the COVID-19 restrictions limited play, the Bulldogs played a variety of teams, but none compared to the level of play they see in the MCC.

"With that short COVID season, we weren't getting a chance to play defense because the teams we were playing didn't have strong attacks," Vertrees said. "Transitioning back to the



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Hermiston's Grace Vertrees hits the ball March 11, 2021, during a set against Pendleton. Vertrees recently signed to continue her volleyball play at Blue Mountain Community College, Pendleton.

MCC was definitely a challenge. It's a lot more competitive. Those girls play club all the time."

Vertrees also is a club player, having spent two summers with the Tri-Cities-based Shockwave.

Between high school and club ball, Vertrees has honed her game.

"I think I am smart with my ball placement," she said. "I analyze what is going on on the other side of the court. I try to find their weakness, whether I am hitting or serving. Not going to lie, when I serve and they have a weak girl in the back, I will serve it there every time."

Vertrees also played basketball at one point, but decided to put her focus on volleyball.

"Volleyball is the sport I feel most passionate about and I put

all my energy toward that," she said.

Neither of her parents, Erick Vertrees and Kasi Sandlin, were athletes in high school, but Vertrees and her younger brother Logan are making up for that.

"My brother is super athletic," Vertrees said. He's 6-4, in the seventh grade, and plays basketball, football and lacrosse."

Working toward the future

Vertrees is working and taking classes to get a leg up on her chosen career. She wants to be a radiologist.

"Right now, I'm working at Maple Moose Coffee Company in Umatilla and doing an internship at Interpath Labs in

Hermiston," she said.

At the lab, Vertrees has the opportunity to do hands-on tasks such as draw blood, work in the lab and interact with patients, which is key in the health care field.

She will take her exam in January for her phlebotomy certification.

"The internship is through a class at the high school," Vertrees said. "The phlebotomy class is something I am doing on my own time, which has taught me time management. I will start my medical assistant certification program next year."

When all is said and done, Vertrees would like to work in the Boise area.

"That's where I want to end up," she said. "I have family in that area. I love that city so much."

ON THE SLATE

Tuesday, Dec. 14

Prep girls basketball

Pendleton at Lewiston (Idaho), 5:30 p.m.
Irrigon at Weston-McEwen, 6 p.m.

Pilot Rock at Riverside, 6 p.m.

Umatilla at Stanfield, 6 p.m.

Prep boys basketball

Pendleton at Lewiston, Idaho, 7 p.m.

Irrigon at Weston-McEwen, 7:30 p.m.

Pilot Rock at Riverside, 7:30 p.m.

Umatilla at Stanfield, 7:30 p.m.

Prep girls bowling

Richland at Hermiston, 3 p.m.

Wednesday, Dec. 15

Prep girls basketball

Stanfield at Nixyaawii, 6 p.m.

Prep boys basketball

Stanfield at Nixyaawii, 7:30 p.m.

Prep boys wrestling

Heppner, Irrigon at Oregon Trail Championships, Echo, noon

College men's basketball

Blue Mountain at Clark College, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, Dec. 16

Prep girls basketball

Umatilla at McLoughlin, 6 p.m.

Riverside at Heppner, 6 p.m.

Pendleton at Clarkston (Washington), 7 p.m.

Prep boys basketball

Umatilla at McLoughlin, 7:30 p.m.

Riverside at Heppner, 7:30 p.m.

Prep girls bowling

Hermiston at Pasco, 3:30 p.m.

Prep girls wrestling

Southridge at Hermiston, 6 p.m.

Prep boys wrestling

Southridge at Hermiston, 7 p.m.

Prep swimming

Pendleton at Parkrose, 4:30 p.m.

College men's basketball

South Puget Sound at Blue Mountain, 2 p.m.

Friday, Dec. 17

Prep girls basketball

Weston-McEwen vs. Irrigon, Heppner Tournament, 3 p.m.

Pilot Rock at Knappa, 5 p.m.

Richland at Hermiston, 5:45 p.m.

Warrenton vs. Heppner, Heppner Tournament, 6 p.m.

Echo at Condon, 6 p.m.

Bickleton at Lone/Arlington, 6 p.m.

Weston-McEwen JV vs. Griswold at Helix Tournament, 6 p.m.

Prep boys basketball

Irrigon vs. Weston-McEwen, Heppner Tournament, 4:30 p.m.

Pilot Rock at Knappa, 6:30 p.m.

Richland at Hermiston, 7:30 p.m.

Warrenton vs. Heppner, Heppner Tournament, 7:30 p.m.

Echo at Condon, 7:30 p.m.

Bickleton at Lone/Arlington, 7:30 p.m.

Long Creek/UKiah vs. Griswold at Helix Tournament, 8 p.m.

College women's basketball

Blue Mountain at Umpqua, 7 p.m.

Prep boys wrestling

Pendleton at Banks, 5 p.m.

Hermiston at Best of the West, Pasco, TBD

Saturday, Dec. 18

Prep girls wrestling

Hermiston at Juanita, 9 a.m.

Prep boys wrestling

Pendleton at Liberty Tournament, 8 a.m.

Hermiston at Best of the West, Pasco, TBD

Prep girls basketball

Griswold at Helix Tournament, TBD

Weston-McEwen vs. Warrenton, Heppner Tournament, 1 p.m.

Pilot Rock at Vernonia, 1 p.m.

Hermiston at Southridge, 3:15 p.m.