

# EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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## QUICK AND GRITTY

### Stanfield's Longhorn signs to play softball at Linfield University

By ANNIE FOWLER  
East Oregonian

STANFIELD — The first time Bob Benson saw Taylor Longhorn on the softball field, she was trying out for his Washington Angels 18U softball team. At the end of the day, Benson knew she would be a good fit.

"At tryouts, she took a ball to the face and she was bleeding," he said. "She said she wanted to finish tryouts. She had the attributes, but that was the icing on the cake. She's hard working and full of grit. She is going to put a lot of pressure on the defense and she is pretty quick. She will be really good for them."

Longhorn, who is a senior at Stanfield, recently signed a letter of intent to play softball at Linfield University, and it was partly that story from Benson that prompted Wildcats coach Jackson Vaughan to offer her an opportunity to play.

"She's a great kid," Benson said. "I don't know if anyone out works her. She plays middle infield or outfield for us. She is either leading off and or turning the lineup over. I would say her strength is offense and her base running. She has good speed and good instincts."

Longhorn, who plays on the Echo/Stanfield softball team in the spring, said she looked at a couple of other schools, but it was Linfield that had everything she was looking for.

"I took a visit to Linfield and I absolutely loved it," she said. "The girls were great and the program is super amazing. I got to hang out with them a little bit. We didn't get to do anything on the field. It was instantly where I wanted to be. I'm super excited about it."

McMinnville also has a small-town feel, which made Longhorn feel at home.

"I went on a day when they had a football game and it was so much fun," said Longhorn, who plans to major in elementary education. "That's where I want to be for my four years."

Linfield won the 2011 NCAA Division III softball title, a season that produced 51 wins and 103 home runs. It was the Wildcats' second national title, having won their first in 2007. Linfield also finished fourth in 2006.



Taylor Longhorn of Stanfield throws to first after putting out Riverside's Michaela Spencer during a game on April 22, 2021. Longhorn, a senior, has signed a letter of intent to play softball at Linfield University in McMinnville.

Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Longhorn said she isn't sure whether she will redshirt her first year with the Wildcats.

"They said my speed would be super useful running the bases, and hitting the ball," she said. "I'm ready to compete for my spot. On my high school team I play shortstop, and on my travel team I played second and outfield. They are looking for me to be in the outfield because of my speed."

#### It's always been softball

Longhorn also played on the Stanfield volleyball team, where she earned second-team Blue Mountain Conference honors this season as a libero.

The Tigers won the BMC title with an 11-1 record, and earned a spot in the 2A state tournament, where they lost in the first round, finishing 19-5 overall.

"I prefer softball over volleyball, but I love my teammates and it was my senior year and I wanted to play with them," Longhorn said.

In softball, the Cougars (Echo is the primary team for the program) finished 15-8 and made it to the first round of state her freshman year.

Her sophomore season was wiped out by the COVID-19 pandemic, and her junior year saw the Cougars go 10-6 in a season that packed 16 games in less than a month.

The 5-foot-2 Longhorn has played two seasons with the Washington Angels, which are based in the Tri-Cities, and has started her third. The team played in a tournament in California last month and finished 5-2. Their two losses were by one run. They will play in a tournament in Las Vegas in January.

"Joining the organization was the best thing I have ever done," Long-

horn said. "They teach not only softball, but life lessons. They have made me a better person."

While the program has been good for Longhorn, she has given as much as she has gotten.

Longhorn hit .311 for the Angels last year, and had 17 stolen bases. "I'm a slapper," she said. "Everyone comes in and I hit it past them. It's super fun to be able to mess with the catchers."

The recent national ranking just came out, and the Angels are ranked 21st out of roughly 2,500 18U teams nationwide that play at their level. Benson said Longhorn has been part of that progress.

He also said he is looking forward to his last season with Longhorn.

"It's fun watching the seniors go on to the national level," he said. "It's nice to see the passing of the baton."

### ON THE SLATE

#### Tuesday, Dec. 21

**Prep girls basketball**  
Pendleton at Corvallis Tournament, TBD  
McLoughlin at Cascade Holiday Classic, TBD  
Heppner at Irrigon, 6 p.m.  
Umatilla at Nixyaawii, 6 p.m.  
Ione/Arlington at Pilot Rock, 6 p.m.  
Stanfield at South Wasco County, 6 p.m.

**Prep boys basketball**  
McLoughlin at Seaside, 5 p.m.  
Baker at Pendleton, 6:30 p.m.  
Umatilla at Nixyaawii, 7:15 p.m.  
Heppner at Irrigon, 7:30 p.m.  
Ione/Arlington at Pilot Rock, 7:30 p.m.  
Stanfield at South Wasco County, 7:30 p.m.

#### Wednesday, Dec. 22

**Prep girls basketball**  
Pendleton at Corvallis Tournament, TBD  
McLoughlin at Cascade Holiday Classic, TBD  
Horizon Christian at Griswold, 2 p.m.  
White Salmon (Washington) at Riverside, 4 p.m.  
Nixyaawii at Union, 5 p.m.

**Boys prep basketball**  
Horizon Christian at Griswold, 4 p.m.  
White Salmon (Washington) at Riverside, 5:30 p.m.  
Nixyaawii at Union, 6:30 p.m.  
McLoughlin at The Dalles, 7 p.m.

**Prep boys wrestling**  
Echo/Stanfield, Heppner/Ione, Irrigon, McLoughlin, Riverside/Arlington at Rollin Schimmel Memorial Tournament, Pendleton, 9 a.m.

#### Thursday, Dec. 23

**Prep girls basketball**  
Weston-McEwen at Elgin, 1 p.m.

**Boys prep basketball**  
Weston-McEwen at Elgin, 2:30 p.m.

#### Monday, Dec. 27

**Prep girls basketball**  
McLoughlin at Baker Invite, TBD  
Nixyaawii at Baker Invite, TBD  
Pilot Rock vs. Condon at Bouncin' Cancer Tournament, Echo, 10 a.m.  
Stanfield vs. Wallowa at Bouncin' Cancer Tournament, Echo, 1 p.m.  
Griswold vs. Echo at Bouncin' Cancer Tournament, Echo, 4 p.m.

**Prep boys basketball**  
McLoughlin at Baker Invite, TBD  
Nixyaawii at Baker Invite, TBD  
Pilot Rock vs. Condon at Bouncin' Cancer Tournament, Echo, 11:30 a.m.  
Stanfield vs. Wallowa at Bouncin' Cancer Tournament, Echo, 2:30 p.m.

## EOU soccer standout ends career with national recognition

### Sarah Mitchell earns All-American honors

By DAVIS CARBAUGH  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A pillar in the Eastern Oregon University women's soccer program ended her career on top.

The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics recently named Sarah Mitchell, a key part of the Mountaineers' backline and midfield, All-American Honorable Mention. This is the second year in a row Mitchell has earned All-American status, cementing her legacy at Eastern Oregon.

"It was a perfect way to end my individual career," she said. "I was really surprised, but it was a really big honor."

Mitchell played midfield and defense for Eastern, helping the team achieve an 11-6-0 record overall and an 8-4-0 showing in conference play. During Mitchell's time in La Grande, the Mountaineers posted a record of 51-14-8.

This season, the native of Palmdale, California, started in 11 games for Eastern and



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Eastern Oregon University's Sarah Mitchell during a soccer match against Corban University on Sept. 25, 2021. Mitchell recently was named National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics Honorable Mention All-American, the second time in her career she has earned the recognition. The senior played a crucial role in both the midfield and backline of Eastern's defense.

was a major part in the team tallying nine shutouts on the year and allowing just 15 goals. Mitchell's versatility at both midfield and defense was essential for head coach Jacob Plocher.

"She's been vital," Plocher said. "Whenever we've asked her to take on a new role, she's been more than happy to do so."

In her four years at Eastern, Mitchell started 56 games and scored four career goals. Mitchell's bread and

butter was her impact on defense, a crucial part of Eastern's efforts in a 2021 season that ended in the conference tournament.

"She's a very talented player and very deserving of the award," Plocher said. "She's definitely earned it."

Mitchell transferred to Eastern after playing her freshman season at Marymount California University in 2016. At the time, her older sister, Natalie Mitchell, was on the team, which was

a big reason she transferred. Mitchell's older brother, Calvin, also played for the Mountaineers.

As an underclassmen acclimating to a new program, Mitchell relied on the Eastern coaching staff and the example of upperclassmen to improve over the years.

"I wanted to play up to their level," Mitchell said. "The team has helped me grow a lot. My coach has always had my back."

After finishing her career as a two-time All-American, Mitchell said she wants to set the same example for younger players in the program.

"I hope my success in the program can help them realize that they can be All-Americans or achieve similar success as well," she said.

Plocher expressed a similar sentiment, but also viewed the award as a means of proving what potential new recruits can achieve in the program.

"It really shows that you can come here and get a great education, have success on the field and be a part of a great program," he said.

Mitchell noted that being

surrounded by positive influences and creating strong relationships with teammates at Eastern was a high point of her time in the program. She credits her friends for helping her work on a solid balance of school,



Plocher

work and sports. For Eastern, Mitchell's individual achievements are a testament to what players in the program can achieve. The Mountaineers will now be tasked with replacing a crucial piece of the puzzle next season.

"We don't have the success that we've had without her," Plocher said. "She'll definitely be missed."

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