

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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1A Eastern Oregon leagues are due for an overhaul



ANNIE FOWLER
FOWLER'S FOCUS

HELIX — The Oregon School Activities Association recently announced the reclassification of schools for the 2022-26 school years.

While there was a lot of shuffling of schools to different levels, the OSAA may have missed the boat in restructuring the 1A leagues in Eastern Oregon.

At present, and with the new plan, Griswold and Nixyaawii are in the Old Oregon League, and will be joined by Pilot Rock.

All of the other teams in the OOL are on the mountain, or beyond in the case of Pine Eagle. While travel in the spring isn't too bad, fall and winter travel along the Interstate 84 mountain pass can be treacherous.

Winter is just beginning, and the freeway already has been closed a few times — as recently as Monday, Dec. 20 — because of crashes and collisions on slick roads.

In the Big Sky League, Echo and Ione are having to travel to the Hood River area, and into Washington, where Lyle, Wishram, Bickleton, Klickitat and Glenwood recently moved to the OSAA.

There could be a solution to all of this — resurrecting the former Big Sky Conference.

The schools on the mountain — Powder Valley, Joseph, Cove, Wallowa, Imbler, Elgin, Pine Eagle and Union — would remain in the Old Oregon League, and the Hood River area (Dufur and South Wasco County) and Washington schools could break off into a new league — the Columbia River Gorge, perhaps.

What does it take to create a new league? OSAA Assistant Activities Director Kyle Stanley had the answer.

“Normally, someone would come forward and ask for us to take a look at it,” Stanley said. “I haven't heard too much, as to anyone asking, so it stays the status quo. It has nothing to do with cost. Each person may have a different answer if asked about it. It would be up to them coming to us.”

Of course, this plan would not



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Griswold's Mayabella Texidor drives toward the basket Friday, Dec. 17, 2021, in Helix against Weston-McEwen JV. While the Oregon School Activities Association announced the reclassification of schools for the 2022-26 school years, there could be a better plan.

work for football, baseball or softball. Not all schools have these teams, which is where the special districts come into play.

The Old Oregon and Big Sky leagues were formed eight years ago. Tammie Parker, Griswold athletic director and former volleyball coach, said at the time she liked the new conferences because of the stiffer competition.

“Right now, we are all OK, but we are two big conferences,” Parker said. “I think in the future there could be some changes. Right now, it has been such a confusing time with COVID, we are all just trying to get settled again.”

With Union and Pilot Rock joining the OOL, scheduling could become an issue.

“We have discussed that we are two large groups, and may have more schools coming in before the next restructuring,” Parker said. “The bigger you are as a league, the harder it is to get games scheduled. We are happy to have Pilot Rock and Union in the Old Oregon League, now we just have to figure out how

to get them into our schedule.”

The old Big Sky Conference once consisted of Arlington, Cascade Locks, Condon, Dufur, Echo, Griswold, Ione, Umapine and Wheeler.

Cascade Locks and Umapine no longer have high schools. Arlington co-opts with Ione, and Wheeler co-opts with Spray and Mitchell.

Putting Dufur in the new league could balance things out, but putting it in the BSC would not be a bad choice.

The former BSC used to have good and long-standing rivalries between the Griswold, Echo and Condon girls basketball teams. In the early 1980s, only one team from the area advanced to state, and it was a knockdown, drag out fight every year for that one spot.

Boys basketball games were a heavyweight fight every Friday and Saturday night.

A Griswold-Ione boys matchup always was a good one, and the full gyms were evidence to that.

It may be time to bring a little bit of the past to the present.

Not only will travel be safer for teams and fans with zero trips over the mountain pass in the winter, but Helix, which is the northernmost team, would have short trips to Nixyaawii, Echo and Pilot Rock. Ione is 82 miles away.

The longest trip is to Fossil (Wheeler High School) at 148 miles, and Sherman (Moro) is 133. Most of those drives are on the freeway until you have to take an exit to your destination.

“I think you look at what's best for travel and safety of the kids,” Ione/Arlington boys basketball coach Dennis Stefani said. “You want your league to be competitive, but also user friendly. I think there is a lot to having your league stay together. There's a tradition that needs to be upheld. The more you move teams around, the less there is.”

Annie Fowler is the sports reporter for the East Oregonian and in her career has covered high school sports, rodeo and Tri-City Americans hockey.

COVID-19 testing expanded after new outbreaks

Hermiston athletes, coaches will be tested three times a week

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The Washington State Department of Health announced Friday, Dec. 17, that effective immediately, all athletes, coaches, team managers and trainers for basketball, wrestling and competitive cheer must complete COVID-19 testing three times per week, regardless of vaccination status.

One test must be conducted at least 24 hours before a contest, and whenever possible, the day of the event.

Previously, the DOH and the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association required athletes to either choose to be vaccinated or be tested twice a week.

While Hermiston High School is an Oregon school, its athletes compete in the WIAA and must follow its protocols.

“Vaccinations, in addition to testing and masking, will help keep our athletes healthy and allow everyone to continue to enjoy sporting events while also limiting the spread of disease,” Dr. Tao Sheng Kwan-Gett, chief science officer, said in the press release. “Getting a booster will make protection against the omicron variant even stronger. The booster vaccine is now available for everyone 16 years and older.”

Citing concerns after outbreaks linked to wrestling tournaments throughout the state, the Department of Health set its new plan in motion. The DOH said in a press release that an estimated 200 cases are linked to the tournaments. Genomic sequencing recently confirmed at least three cases are omicron.

Hermiston had positive tests within its boys basketball team on Dec. 17, forcing the Bulldogs to forfeit their games against Richland and Southridge.

A mask mandate for fans, coaches and players who are not actively competing, remains in place.

At present, the Oregon School Activities Association has not gotten a mandate from the Department of Health for weekly COVID-19 testing, according to OSAA Assistant Activities Director Kyle Stanley.

Echo's Curiel co-MVP of Special District 4

Echo receiver averaged 100 yards a game

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

ECHO — Echo senior Javon Curiel, who played quarterback and wide receiver for the Cougars, was named the Special District 4 Co-Offensive Player of the Year. He also was a second-team defensive back.

Curiel was one of three Cougars named to the first team. He is joined by junior defensive lineman Mason Murdock, and sophomore quarterback Dom Curiel.

Javon Curiel averaged 100 receiving yards and one touchdown a game. At quarterback, he threw for an average of 45 yards a game.

Dom Curiel averaged 213 yards passing and two touchdowns a game, while Murdock averaged seven tackles, two quarterback sacks and a fumble recovery an outing.

Echo also had a number of players named to the second team and honorable mention team.

The Cougars finished the season with a 4-3 record, and outscored their opponents on average 33-26 per game.



J. Curiel



Murdock



D. Curiel

Special District 4

Player of the Year — Nate Clark, jr., Wheeler.

Co-offensive Players of the Year — Clint Rutherford, sr., Wheeler; Cole Teel, jr., Prairie City; Javon Curiel, sr., Echo.

Co-defensive Players of the Year — Eli Wright, jr., Prairie City; Logan Sweeney, so., Wheeler.

Defense

First Team

Defensive line — Logan Sweeney, so., Wheeler; Eli Wright, jr., Prairie City; Mason Murdock, jr., Echo. Linebacker — Clint Rutherford, sr., Wheeler; Wes Voigt, so., Prairie City. Defensive back — Nate Clark, jr., Wheeler. Return man — Nate Clark, jr., Wheeler.

Second Team

Defensive line — Kale Ferguson, jr., Joseph; Trey Brown, so., Prairie City; Brock Farley, sr., Pine Eagle; Harley Miller, sr., Joseph. Linebacker — Tucker Wright, so., Prairie City; Jaxon Grover, so., Joseph. Defensive back — Will Seggerman, sr., Pine Eagle; Javon Curiel, sr., Echo. Return man — Doyal Lawrence, so., Prairie City.

Honorable Mention

Defensive line — Tom

Chase, sr., Wheeler; Storm McCoy, fr., South Wasco County; Zach Neuberger, so., Wheeler; Jesse Larrison, so., Joseph; Dax Davis, jr., Echo; Ethan Rostock, so., Dayville/Monument. Linebacker — Zach Ferguson, sr., Dayville/Monument; Timbre Hill, sr., Pine Eagle; Tommy Bunch, jr., Wheeler; Cameron Skinner, sr., Echo; James Best, jr., South Wasco County; Remington Sheer, sr., South Wasco County; Kane Johnson, so., Joseph. Defensive back — Illyssa Auty, sr., Dayville/Monument; Carter Boise, jr., Wheeler; John Titus, sr., Prairie City; Sam Wyse, so., Echo; Joey Holloway, so., South Wasco County; Chase Butner, sr., Pine Eagle. Return man — Jaxon Grover, so., Joseph.

Offense

First Team

Quarterback — Dom Curiel, so., Echo. Running back — Clint Rutherford, sr., Wheeler; Cole Teel, jr., Prairie City. Wide receiver — Javon Curiel, sr., Echo. Offensive line — Tom Chase, sr., Wheeler; Eli Wright, jr., Prairie City. Long snapper — Riley Walker, jr., Dayville/Monument. Punter — Trace Collier, sr., Joseph. Kicker — Nils Lahme, sr.,

Wheeler.

Second Team

Quarterback — Wes Voigt, so., Prairie City. Running back — John Titus, sr., Prairie City; Remington Sheer, sr., South Wasco County. Offensive line — Logan Sweeney, so., Wheeler; Marcos Chavez, fr., South Wasco County; Cody Reagan, so., Prairie City. Long snapper — Cohen Simpson, so., Pine Eagle. Punter — Brock Farley, sr., Pine Eagle; Ethan Rostock, so., Dayville/Monument. Kicker — Cole Teel, jr., Prairie City; Kale Ferguson, jr., Joseph; Nick Packard, fr., South Wasco County.

Honorable Mention

Quarterback — Carter Boise, jr., Wheeler; Trace Collier, sr., Joseph; Brock Farley, sr., Pine Eagle. Running back — Tucker Wright, so., Prairie City; Joey Holloway, so., South Wasco County. Wide receiver — Harley Miller, sr., Joseph; Zach Ferguson, sr., Dayville/Monument; Timbre Hill, sr., Pine Eagle. Offensive line — Will Seggerman, sr., Pine Eagle; Kale Ferguson, jr., Joseph; Brad Wilcox, sr., Joseph; Alan Griego, fr., Echo. Long snapper — Carter Boise, jr., Wheeler. Kicker — Ondrij Klic, so., Huntington.

ON THE SLATE

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.
Griswold vs. Echo at Bouncin' Cancer Tournament, Echo, 5:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Dec. 28

Prep girls basketball
McLoughlin at Baker Invite, TBD
Nixyaawii at Baker Invite, TBD
Pilot Rock vs. Griswold at Bouncin' Cancer Tournament, Echo, 10 a.m.
Joseph at Ione/Arlington, 2 p.m.
Stanfield vs. Echo at Bouncin' Cancer Tournament, Echo, 4:30 p.m.
Riverside at Columbia-Burbank (WA), 6 p.m.