

Top 10:

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6. Pendleton girls soccer team has record year

PENDLETON — Behind twins Reilly and Kelsey Lovercheck, the Bucks posted their best season in school history.

Pendleton posted its first 10-win season in school history (the record was nine in 2013), finishing with an 11-4-1 overall record, and 7-2-1 in Intermountain Conference play.

The Bucks won their first-ever state playoff game on Nov. 2, beating Thurston 2-1. They then lost to La Salle 4-0 in the quarterfinals.

Pendleton got off to a hot start to the season, winning its first eight games before losing two in a row. The Bucks' school record 10th win came in a 3-0 victory over Hood River Valley on Oct. 26.

Senior Reilly Lovercheck picked up Player of the Year honors in the Intermountain Conference, and also was a 5A first-team all-state selection.

Pendleton coach Kiana Rickman was named the 5A state Coach of the Year.

5. Nichols, Heppner boys run to third at state

HEPPNER — Even at his worst, Trevor Nichols is better than most.

The Heppner junior turned in a time of 16 minutes, 48.20 seconds to place third at the 2A/1A State Cross-country Championships on Saturday, Nov. 6, at Lane Community College.

"I was trying to be conservative because I didn't feel too well," Nichols said. "With about 800 (meters) left, I tried to put a little surge on. Then I heard them coming behind me. The final 300, I sprinted it out. The last 100, I outkicked Caleb (Brown of Pine Eagle), who ended up fourth."

The finish was the best Nichols has placed at state, but his time was off his best showing.

"The course was slow today," Nichols said. "Every step you were slipping, even with spikes on. It was a blessing that the rain went away before our race."

Even though they were missing two key runners because of illness, the Mustangs rallied the troops to finish third in the team standings with 123 points.

"I was shocked," Heppner coach Russ Nichols said. "I really could not believe we got third. I thought they all ran pretty darn well. Trevor ran well and finished strong."

4. Nixyaawii wins 1A state title

MISSION — The Golden Eagles were a beacon of light in a dreary time. They were the first team to win a state title in the COVID era, and it gave hope to others that things were taking a turn for the better.

Tyasin Burns scored 16 points to lead Nixyaawii to a 50-29 victory over Damascus Christian on June 24, and pick up the coveted 1A state championship trophy.

Damascus scored the first basket of the game, but that would be its only lead as the Golden Eagles tied the score, then took off.

Dakota Sams added 12 points for the Golden Eagles, while Ruger Deming chipped in 10, and Dylan Abrahamson added eight, all in the third quarter.

Burns and Dakota Sams were named to the all-tour-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Pendleton's Kelsey Lovercheck chases down the ball Nov. 2, 2021, during a 2-1 win over the Thurston Colts in Pendleton.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Heppner High School's Trevor Nichols (526) and Alex McIntyre, of Weston-McEwen (573) lead a pack of runners at the 2A/1A boys State Cross-country Championships on Nov. 6, 2021, at Lane Community College in Eugene. Nichols finished third with a time of 16:48.2 with McIntyre finishing seventh with a time of 17:00.

nament first team.

The Golden Eagles finished the season 15-1. Their only loss was 85-84 to Yakama Tribal (Washington) on June 7. They averaged 70 points a game.

"They are a special group of kids," Nixyaawii coach Ryan Sams said. "From the first day of practice we knew we could win a state championship. Baker and La Grande, and even Umatilla, gave us what we needed to see to get here."

3. Heppner football turns in a spectacular season

HEPPNER — The Mustangs were inches away from making another appearance in the 2A state title game, but an 8-6 loss to Coquille in the semifinals derailed their plans.

Heppner had won 29 games in a row before the loss to the Red Devils. They finished the season with an 11-1 record. The Mustangs averaged 29.5 points a game, while the defense allowed just 6 points a game.

It was the first loss for the Mustangs since Nov. 2, 2018 — a span of 1,114 days. This year's senior class finished its career with a 36-4 record.

The Mustangs had four players selected to the 2A all-state football team first team — including three who earned honors on both sides of the ball.

Senior Brock Hisler was named the Defensive Back of the Year, which includes linebackers and secondary players.

Hisler earned first-team honors as a running back and linebacker, while senior Jace Coe was selected as a wide receiver and defensive back, and senior Conor Brosnan as a linebacker and offensive lineman.

Senior Blane Mahoney earned honors as a defensive lineman.

2. OSAA Reclassification

WILSONVILLE — Starting with the 2022 fall sports season, Pendleton will drop down from 5A to 4A and the Greater Oregon League with Baker, La Grande and Ontario.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Heppner's Jace Coe (20) pushes through a hole in the Weston-McEwen defense during the first quarter Nov. 13, 2021, in the quarterfinal round of the Oregon School Activities Association Class 2A state football tournament at Les Payne Field in Heppner. The Mustangs defeated the TigerScots 40-0.

It will be a seamless fit."

La Grande and Baker are ecstatic that Pendleton is joining their league.

"We are very pleased to have Pendleton in our league," La Grande AD Darren Goodman said. "It will help strengthen our league. Everyone will have to raise their game, for sure."

Pendleton is one of a handful of local teams the redistricting affects.

In addition to Mac-Hi moving to 3A, Irrigon will drop down to the 2A Blue Mountain Conference, and Pilot Rock will drop to the 1A Old Oregon League with Griswold and Nixyaawii.

The Mac-Hi, Irrigon and Pilot Rock moves benefit the schools, which have recently seen enrollment drop.

While travel will be reduced for Pendleton, the hunt for nonleague games begins now.

Pendleton football coach Erik Davis said several of the 5A teams they have played in the past will be on their nonleague schedule.

1) Sports returns

It's been almost two years since the COVID-19 pandemic first shut down high school sports. An entire spring season was lost in 2020, and when fall rolled

around, gyms were empty and football fields were void of Friday night lights.

The spring of 2021 brought joy to athletes, coaches and fans as sports were able to return — with several safety protocols and modified seasons.

Everything from baseball to wrestling were crammed into four months. Each sports season got approximately six weeks to get its games in, and there were no Oregon School Activities Association or Washington Interscholastic Activities Association state tournaments.

Some sports had state tournaments coordinated by coaches, athletics directors and communities.

Football, cross-country and volleyball opened the first week of March and ended in April, just in time for spring sports.

Heppner finished with a 5-0 record and looked every bit the part to make a run for another state title. Quarterback Jayden Wilson was selected to play in the Shrine Game and the Les Schwab Bowl. His teams won both games.

The Heppner volleyball team was 9-1, and Echo was 10-4.

On the cross-country course, Stanfield's Sisay Hurty

ran his way to a state title.

Come spring, baseball and softball were in full swing, with the Pendleton girls finishing 15-2 and having five players named to the 5A all-state team. Bucks coach Tim Cary was named Coach of the Year.

The Heppner/Ione baseball team finished 15-4 and placed third at the 2A/1A baseball state tournament.

Heppner's Hayden Hiatt and Weston-McEwen's Blane Peal were named to the 2A/1A all-state team, while Heppner's Jackson Lehman was named to the second team.

The Pendleton baseball team went undefeated in Intermountain Conference play, and 15-3 overall. Payton Lambert was named co-Player of the Year in the IMC, while Kyle Field was Pitcher of the Year and TJ Haguewood was Coach of the Year.

Basketball and wrestling filled the last slot of sports, with the Nixyaawii boys winning a state basketball title.

On the wrestling mat, Pendleton's Dawson Tremper was second at the 5A state meet at 106 pounds, while Heppner's Jace Coe was second at 182 pounds at the 2A/1A tournament.



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Pictured above (l to r): Stacy Hunter, Associate Commercial Relationship Manager; Juliann Dodd, SVP/Commercial Banking Team Leader; Steve Campbell, VP/ Senior Commercial Relationship Manager



Corey Kirk/Baker City Herald, File

Brothers Dakota and Greyson Sams embrace as the final buzzer sounds in Nixyaawii's victory over Damascus Christian in the Oregon 1A State Basketball Tournament on June 24, 2021, at Baker High School.