

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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TOP 10 OF 2021

Celebrating state titles and record-breaking performances

The return of sports brings a sense of hope, normalcy

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

10. Echo volleyball dominates

ECHO — The Cougars won the Big Sky League with an 11-0 record. As impressive as that is, they did it while not dropping a set.

“They play with intensity,” Echo coach Des Thew said of her team. “Our girls play in a system. They hit hard and put it where people aren’t. We have a whole team of legit volleyball players. We don’t have a weak spot and I can trust the ball in their hands.”

Echo went on to host Umpqua Valley Christian in the second round of the 1A state playoffs, beating the Monarchs 25-11, 25-14, 25-17 to reach the quarterfinals for the first time in a dozen years.

The Cougars finally ran out of mojo in the quarterfinals with a 25-11, 25-16, 25-21 loss at St. Paul. They finished the season 22-5.

Senior Faith McCarty was named the BSL Player of the Year, while sophomore Nevaeh Thew and senior Charlei Harwood were named to the first team.

McCarty led the Cougars with 147 kills and also had 117 assists, 152 digs and 38 service aces.

9. Riverside boys soccer team reaches semifinals

BOARDMAN — Led by senior attacker Jose Napoles, the Pirates reached the 3A/2A/1A state soccer semifinals.

A spot in the championship game was thwarted by Dayton, who beat the third-ranked Pirates 2-1 in the semis.

“They weren’t better than us,” Riverside coach Juan Duenas said. “We had too many mistakes all game that all season we never had.”

Riverside opened the state playoffs with an 8-0 victory over Sutherlin, then beat Pleasant Hill 4-1 in the quarterfinals.

The Pirates, who finished the season with a 15-2 record, won the Eastern Oregon League title with an 8-0 record. Other than their loss to Dayton, they dropped a nonleague game to Catlin Gable on Sept. 18.

Napoles was named the Special District 6 Player of the Year, and was a first-team all-state selection.

In addition to Napoles, Riverside had seven other players named to the all-league first team — seniors Adair Rodriguez, Pablo Claustro, Diego Magana, Trinidad Mendoza, Benny Sanchez, Bert Sanchez, and sophomore goalkeeper Juan Medina.

Benny Sanchez earned second-team all-state honors, while Claustro, Magana, Mendoza, Bert Sanchez and Medina were named to the honorable mention team.

8. Round-Up returns, Stetson Wright wins 3 titles

PENDLETON — The Pendleton Round-Up is one of the top rodeos in the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, and after a one-year hiatus because of the coronavirus pandemic, fans returned in droves to watch the action.

Stetson Wright, a 22-year-old cowboy from Milford, Utah, who comes from a family steeped in rodeo history, won the saddle bronc and bull riding titles on Sept. 18 for his first Pendleton Round-Up titles.

With those titles at the 111th Round-Up came the coveted



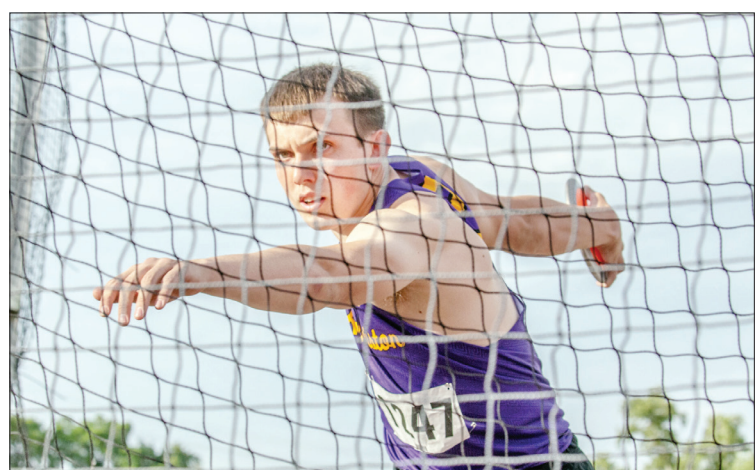
Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

A smattering of preapproved fans lines the stands at the Pendleton Round-Up Arena on March 12, 2021, ahead of Pendleton’s 20-12 win over Ridgeview. After the pandemic wiped out almost two years of sports, the return of sports was the top sports story of 2021.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Echo’s Faith McCarty (13) dives after the ball Oct. 30, 2021, during a three set win over the Umpqua Valley Christian Monarchs in Echo.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Hermiston’s Caden Hottman prepares to throw the discus at the MCC track and field championship on May 6, 2021, at Fran Rish Stadium in Richland, Washington. Hottman took first with a throw of 165 feet even.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Riverside’s Jose Napoles (21) and Dayton’s Danny Anguiano (8) chase down the ball Nov. 9, 2021, during the Riverside Pirates 2-1 loss to the Dayton Pirates in the semifinal round of the Oregon School Activities Association Class 3A/2A/1A State Soccer Championship at Riverside High School in Boardman. Napoles was named the Special District 6 Player of the Year.

all-around title — an honor won a record seven times by Trevor Brazile.

He won \$22,476, which broke Brazile’s Pendleton record of \$20,205 that was set in 2012.

Wright also became the first cowboy since Lewis Feild to win three events at Pendleton. Feild won bareback riding, saddle bronc riding and the all-around title in 1989 — well before Wright was even born.

Wright’s older brother, Rusty, finished third in the saddle bronc event.

The Wright boys got their start at home, learning from their dad, Cody, who won the Pendleton saddle bronc title in 2010.

“We want to match our dad,”



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Stetson Wright, of Milford, Utah, poses for a portrait with the East Oregonian trophy after winning All-Around Cowboy on Sept. 18, 2021, at the Pendleton Round-Up.

Stetson Wright said. “If we are doing good, it’s because he has something to do with it. If you are coming out of a slump, he has something to do with it. He is the backbone of our bronc riding careers.”

7. Destroying records

UMATILLA COUNTY — Hermiston’s Caden Hottman and Pendleton’s Sam Jennings were nothing shy of impressive this spring. By the time they were done, they owned the school records in their signature events.

Hottman was a virtual unknown when he competed in his first high school track meet as a junior. By the end of June, he was well known in the Mid-Columbia Conference and at the national level.

In his third track meet of the year, Hottman had a monster throw of 178 feet in the discus on April 15, which broke Tre Neal’s Hermiston school record of 169 feet, 2 inches, set on April 15, 2016, at the Oregon Relays.

Hottman won two MCC titles, winning the discus with a mark of 165 feet, and the shot put with a toss of 49-8. He was named the MCC Field Athlete of the Year.

On June 30, at The Outdoor Nationals at Hayward Field, Hottman unleashed a throw of 181-6 to place sixth.

He hit his top throw on his second attempt. Hermiston track coach Emily Strot said the mark will replace Hottman’s previous school record of 178 feet.

Jennings and his javelin were well-known throughout Oregon, but he, too, put his name among



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Pendleton’s Sam Jennings throws the javelin during the Pendleton Invite on April 16, 2021. Jennings took first with a throw of 177-9½.

the top throwers in the nation.

At a home meet on April 30, Jennings launched a throw of 198-11 to break Geoff Herd’s school record of 186-10 set in 2009.

Jennings won the javelin title at the 5A State Track and Field Championships on Saturday, May 22, with a toss of 190 feet.

But he was far from done. He then threw 207-10 on June 26 at a meet in Boise, then placed seventh a few days later with a toss of 189-10 at The Outdoor Nationals.

Then came the big one. Jennings blew away the competition July 10 at the USA Track & Field Oregon Association Track and Field Championships at Jesuit High School in Beaverton.

He unleashed a personal best throw of 224-9¾ to win the event and soar to the No. 1 spot in the nation for high school throwers.

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