

# EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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## HAPPINESS IN HER OWN BACKYARD

### Pendleton's Brielle Youncs inks deal to play soccer for BMCC

By ANNIE FOWLER  
East Oregonian

**P**ENDLETON — Sometimes our friends can lead us down the wrong path. For Brielle Youncs, her best friend led her to the soccer field, and the Pendleton senior has reaped the rewards.

YOUNCS signed a letter of intent on Dec. 5, to play soccer at Blue Mountain Community College.

"I wanted to stay local," said Youncs, who wants to major in elementary education. "I have a job at (Dutch Bros. Coffee) that I really like, and I'm a really big family person. I wanted to stay close to home. Jordan (Hillmick) has a good program for it being kind of brand new. I think the program at BMCC has a really good atmosphere."

Hillmick is excited to add another local player to his roster. Blue Mountain also has players from Hermiston, Riverside and Irrigon.

"She is super athletic, just a raw athlete in general," Hillmick said of Youncs. "She is very quick. I got to watch her develop over the past two years. It's super exciting to pluck someone out of your own backyard."

BMCC, which just finished its sixth season in the Northwest Athletic Conference, still is building its program. The pandemic wiped out one season, and this past fall, the Timberwolves played just 12 games.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

**Pendleton's Brielle Youncs (14) chases down a ball amid a crowd of players during the second half in March 2021 against the Eagles. Youncs signed a letter of intent on Dec. 5 to play soccer at Blue Mountain Community College, Pendleton.**

"We are building the program little by little," Hillmick said. "Brielle is a tireless worker, she wants pointers on what to work on. I love to see that. Even when things didn't go her way, she got after it. She's also an extremely nice person and a great student."

YOUNCS, who also plays basketball and softball, had a void in her fall schedule. Pendleton soccer

coach Kiana Rickman asked her if she played a fall sport. Her answer was no.

That's when former Pendleton goalkeeper Lindsey Pasena-Little-sky stepped in.

"When I was choosing between cross-country and soccer, I wanted to run for purpose," Youncs said.

"Lindsey and I have been best friends since kindergarten. She got

me into playing soccer. I played when I was really little, but I hadn't played since grade school. I have no regrets."

A defender, Youncs was part of the Bucks' defense that limited opposing teams to an average 1.5 goals per game.

YOUNCS, who played left back, stopped two corner kick shots this season. She was named to the Inter-

mountain Conference honorable mention team.

The Bucks posted their first 10-win season in school history, finishing with an 11-4-1 overall record, and 7-2-1 in IMC play. Pendleton won its first-ever state playoff game on Nov. 2, beating Thurston 2-1. The Bucks then lost to La Salle in the quarterfinals.

"This season was special," Youncs said. "I don't think a lot of people look at girls soccer being a top sport. We never had fans come to our games. When we had our home playoff game, there were so many people and it was so loud and a lot of fun. The team is so close, and I have made so many close friendships with them."

#### A family of athletes

YOUNCS' dad, Roger, was a stand-out football, basketball and track athlete at Weston-McEwen High School, while her mom, Jeanine, was a star basketball player at Pendleton High School.

"Basketball was her favorite sport," Youncs said of her mom. "I have played basketball since I was little, and I do like it. I've been playing with the same girls since we were little. We've had a really, really tough preseason this year, but it's making us better."

YOUNCS, who is the catcher on the Pendleton softball team, was an honorable mention selection by the IMC coaches as a junior.

"I have played softball since I was in the third grade," Youncs said. "I was kind of burned out. I really fell in love with soccer. I fell in love with our team."

## Leading the way

### Transfers Phillip Malatare, Xavier Lovelace carry load for injury-plagued Mountaineers

By DAVIS CARBAUGH  
The Observer

**LA GRANDE** — Two new names have quickly become the focal points for the Eastern Oregon University men's basketball team.

After a season-ending injury just four games into the year, the days of Max McCullough leading the stat sheets with 30 points are no longer feasible this season. Faced with replacing the program's all-time leading scorer, Eastern has relied on transfers Phillip Malatare and Xavier Lovelace to lead the way.

"It was tough coming into a new team and trying to figure out how everyone plays, but I think right away me and (Xavier) connected really well on the court," Malatare said. "I think the more games we get under our belts, the more comfortable we'll get with each other. But, we're just trying to get everyone involved — it takes all 10 of us to really make a difference."

#### New roles

Injuries to McCullough and guard Paul Pennington have had a huge impact on Eastern, but they have also affected each current player's role. Malatare joined the program from North Idaho, where he averaged 10.2 points per game and four assists per contest. Coming into the program, his role was intended to be a primary ball handler in order to play McCullough off the ball — now Malatare finds himself as the team's leading scorer, averaging 19 points per game. He also leads the team with 3.4 assists per game, 22 steals on the season and is second on the Mountaineers with 5.8 rebounds per game.

"This year I've had to pick up the scoring a lot more, as well as with (Xavier)," Malatare said. "I think it's game-by-game though, each game there might be a different guy that steps up."

Lovelace also has seen an increased role, serving as the team's top rebounder. The sophomore averages a 8.7 rebounds per game and is second on the team with 13

points per game.

Lovelace noted that being thrust into a primary role helped speed up the trust-building process with new teammates.

"I think just leading by example has helped both of us. Whenever you do say something and you tend to do it, everybody else tries to follow that lead," he said. "For us newcomers that was a big step — we had to be able to do it before we could tell anybody to do anything."

The duo has quickly become a key part of the new identity Eastern is working to establish, making the best of injuries and personnel. Lovelace's rebounding prowess along with Malatare's efficient ball handling and ability to drive to the basket create a balanced effort for the Mountaineers.

"We've been figuring out how to play with each other," Lovelace said. "I think his strengths and my strengths really complement each other."

#### Building toward success

For Malatare, a more conventional schedule of conference games in the second half of the season offers the chance for Eastern to build consistency. The Mountaineers played nine straight road games in the early part of the season, including two exhibitions against NCAA Division I opponents.

"We're definitely a long way from peaking," Malatare said. "I think once we get games every weekend we'll find a rhythm as the second part of the season goes on. I think we're going to make a big run."

Both Malatare and Lovelace noted that Eastern's difficult nonconference slate of games this year prepared the team well, through trial by fire.

"I think those were great games in order to see where we are and what we can be," Lovelace said. "We competed for a little while against Idaho State, which showed us that we can compete with anybody and that we can be a great team."



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

**Eastern Oregon University's Xavier Lovelace makes a drive toward the basket Oct. 30, 2021, during the second half of the game against Montana Western University at Quinn Coliseum, La Grande. The sophomore from Sacramento, California, has 15 rebounds on the season.**



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

**Eastern Oregon University's Phillip Malatare drives to the basket during the first half of the game Oct. 30, 2021, against Montana Western University at Quinn Coliseum, La Grande. Malatare is the team's leading scorer, averaging 19 points per game.**

Lovelace emphasized that the team stresses looking at ways to improve after losses. Eastern lost by three points to No. 18 College of Idaho and four points to No. 17 LC State. Malatare stated that as the team focuses to improve on mistakes and grows closer as a unit, those tight losses against top competition can easily swing to victories later in the season.

"We try to find little things that we can do better after close losses. If we do that, I think we will win games," Malatare said. "

While the duo has quickly become the one-two punch for

the Mountaineers this season, the expectations are to continue improving. Eastern is 8-7 and 2-5 in conference play, leaving 15 conference matchups in the season to determine the team's potential.

"It's still very much a work in progress," Lovelace said. "We're still not even close to where we want to be or where we could be, but I think we're on the right track. I think we're working toward something really special."

Eastern plays 10 conference games in a jam-packed month of January, which will go a long way toward defining the season.

## ON THE SLATE

Schedules subject to change

### THURSDAY, JAN. 6

**Prep girls bowling**  
Hermiston at Kamiakin, 2:30 p.m.

### FRIDAY, JAN. 7

**Prep girls basketball**  
Kennewick at Hermiston, 5:45 p.m.  
Vale at Irrigon, 6 p.m.  
Nyssa at Riverside, 6 p.m.  
Union at Heppner, 6 p.m.  
Stanfield at Pilot Rock, 6 p.m.  
Nixyaawii at Imbler, 6 p.m.  
Griswold at Cove, 6 p.m.  
Sherman at Echo, 6 p.m.  
Lone/Arlington at Condon, 6 p.m.  
La Salle at Pendleton, 6:30 p.m.

**Prep boys basketball**  
Pendleton at La Salle, 7:15 p.m.  
Kennewick at Hermiston, 7:30 p.m.  
Vale at Irrigon, 7:30 p.m.  
Nyssa at Riverside, 7:30 p.m.  
Union at Heppner, 7:30 p.m.  
Stanfield at Pilot Rock, 7:30 p.m.  
Griswold at Cove, 7:30 p.m.  
Nixyaawii at Imbler, 7:30 p.m.  
Sherman at Echo, 7:30 p.m.  
Lone/Arlington at Condon, 7:30 p.m.

**College women's basketball**  
EOU vs. Warner Pacific, 5:30 p.m.

**College men's basketball**  
EOU vs. Warner Pacific, 7:30 p.m.

**Preps boys wrestling**  
Echo/Stanfield, Heppner/Lone, Riverside at Jo-Hi Invitational, noon  
Hermiston at Rollie Lane, Nampa, Idaho, TBD

**College men's wrestling**  
EOU at Arizona Christian, 4 p.m.

### SATURDAY, JAN. 8

**Prep girls basketball**  
McLoughlin at Ontario, 3 p.m.  
Heppner at Grant Union, 4 p.m.  
Pilot Rock at Union, 4 p.m.  
Elgin at Nixyaawii, 4 p.m.  
Echo at Bickleton, 4 p.m.  
Spray/Mitchell/Wheeler at Lone/Arlington, 4 p.m.  
Weston-McEwen at Stanfield, 4 p.m.

**Prep boys basketball**  
Weston-McEwen at Stanfield, 4 p.m.  
McLoughlin at Ontario, 4:30 p.m.  
Heppner at Grant Union, 5:30 p.m.  
Pilot Rock at Union, 5:30 p.m.  
Elgin at Nixyaawii, 5:30 p.m.  
Echo at Bickleton, 5:30 p.m.  
Spray/Mitchell/Wheeler at Lone/Arlington, 5:30 p.m.

**College women's basketball**  
EOU vs. Multnomah, 3 p.m.

**College men's basketball**  
EOU vs. Multnomah, 5 p.m.

**Preps boys wrestling**  
Echo/Stanfield, Heppner/Lone, Riverside at Jo-Hi Invitational, noon  
Hermiston at Rollie Lane, Nampa, Idaho, TBD

**College men's wrestling**  
EOU at Embury-Riddle (Arizona), 6 p.m.

**Prep swimming**  
Pendleton at Jay Rowen Invite, Redmond, TBD

### MONDAY, JAN. 10

**Prep girls basketball**  
Stanfield at Enterprise, 5 p.m.  
**Prep boys basketball**  
Stanfield at Enterprise, 6:30 p.m.