

# EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2022

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## Men's wrestling falls two spots in latest NAIA poll

East Oregonian

LA GRANDE — In the latest National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics coaches' poll, the Eastern Oregon University men's wrestling program continued to earn a spot among the top 20 teams.

The Mountaineers came in at No. 19 in the latest NAIA Coaches' Top-20 poll, which was released on Jan. 27. The ranking is two spots behind where the team found itself in last week's poll.

Eastern received 44 votes, earning a tie with Embry-Riddle at No. 19. The Mountaineers saw three wrestlers earn individual national rankings.

Senior Noel Orozco came in at No. 4 in the 285-pound division, while sophomore Kyle Knudson was also ranked No. 4 at the 184-pound

level. Senior Keegan Mulhill earned a No. 11 ranking at the 174-pound weight class.

Orozco is coming off a strong showing at the Missouri Valley Invitational last weekend, placing second overall in his division. The senior went 4-1 on the weekend and scored 20 points for a limited Eastern squad.

Eastern is one of four Cascade Collegiate Conference teams ranked in the top 20, with Montana State-Northern and Menlo College both earning rankings in the top 10. Embry-Riddle and Eastern rounded out the rankings for conference schools.

The Mountaineers return to action Feb. 5 in a road dual against Southern Oregon before traveling to Havre, Montana for the Cascade Collegiate Conference Championships on Feb. 18.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Eastern Oregon University senior Noel Orozco, left, an All-American at 285 pounds, wrestles for the Mountaineers. The men's wrestling team ranked No. 19 in the Jan. 27, 2022, National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics Coaches' Top-20 Poll.

### BMCC SOFTBALL

## Roster under new direction

By JEFF BUDLONG  
For the East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Ben Knopf's first year as head softball coach at Blue Mountain Community College has been anything but conventional.

Knopf was hired in July to take over a program that did not have a season the previous year. He needed to build a roster that had nearly no returners on it.

"I was on the recruiting trail two days after being hired and brought in 12 players in about 40 days," Knopf said. "I was very open and upfront, and just told them that we needed athletes. We just had a conversation."

It is a job he continues to do today, building the team's strength and depth for seasons to come.

Knopf may be new to this job, but he brings plenty of softball coaching experience with him having most recently worked as an assistant coach in Bottineau, North Dakota. He also had stops at Bend High School, Eastern Oregon University and 10 years coaching travel ball.

The Timberwolves have one returning player on the team, sophomore infielder Ariana Knight, and she is joined by transfer Jaycee Jerome. Knopf also lost a pitcher after she transferred to a Division I school. The roster is completed by 11 freshmen.

There are a lot of new faces, but they did get a chance to get used to each other during the fall when they split eight games.

Knopf has been pleased with the team's dedication to prepare for the season that begins March 4 with a pair of home games against Clackamas. The Timberwolves' first eight games are all scheduled to take place in Pendleton.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

The Blue Mountain Community College softball team is gearing up to start its 2022 spring season under the direction of new head coach Ben Knopf and a lineup of 12 new players.

Knopf said his team needs to continue to make progress in all areas, but pitch selection and running on the basepaths will be key.

Even with the progress made in the fall, there were more challenges that followed. Knopf left the team after the fall to deal with a personal matter, and the pandemic has made it difficult to practice. Players have missed time dealing with COVID-19 as has Knopf, who tested positive in late January.

"Building that trust and making those relationships is important," Knopf said. "We have been practicing since the beginning of the winter term, but it has been hit and miss

because of COVID-19.

"Early on, I gave the girls a bucket of balls and just told them they had to get their cuts in on their own. We were just trying to be proactive and adjusting on the fly."

Knopf has had to put it on his players to work on their fundamentals and continue to improve their game as they can.

Knopf has a two- to three-year plan, but believes the Timberwolves can sneak up on teams this year who may underestimate the new group. With so many new faces, everyone will get a chance to make their mark, including a pair of pitchers in Jamisin Manzanares and Elizabeth Tuholski.

Success will not be measured by wins and losses, but how much the team grows throughout the season and comes together as a group, Knopf said.

Knopf believes the biggest success for the Timberwolves this season is just having the opportunity to get back on the diamond.

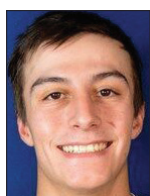
"A lot of these girls were in high school during COVID, so they missed that season," he said. "Everybody has been itching for normalcy, and I think softball kind of represents that. If we can get out there and play as many games as possible it is going to bring some peace of mind to the team, school and community."

## EOU's Malatare is conference player of the week

By DAVIS CARBAUGH  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University men's basketball player Phillip Malatare had himself quite a week. The point guard hit the game-winning shot in an unexpected upset victory and averaged 21 points per game as the Mountaineers went 2-1. The Cascade Collegiate Conference named Malatare its men's basketball player of the week in an announcement Monday, Jan. 31.

Malatare led the way in a 93-91 overtime victory over No. 13 College of Idaho on Jan. 25, which was arguably one of the team's biggest wins in recent years. It was Malatare's 11 overtime points and game-winning fadeaway that led the charge for the huge upset victory. The guard drove to the right wing and connected on a shot from just inside the arc with three seconds



Malatare



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Eastern Oregon University's Phillip Malatare drives to the basket during the first half of the match Oct. 30, 2021, against Montana Western University at Quinn Coliseum, La Grande. The Cascade Collegiate Conference named Malatare its men's basketball player of the week in an announcement Monday, Jan. 31, 2022.

remaining in overtime.

The native of Arlee, Montana, finished with a game-high 27 points off 10-20 shooting in the

win over the Yotes, adding five assists and two rebounds.

Eastern lost a tough matchup to Bushnell 82-75 on Jan. 28, but

bounced back with a 84-74 win over Corban on the following day. Malatare led the Mountaineers in scoring against Bushnell, tallying 22 points — he added five rebounds and dished out three assists.

In the win over Corban, Malatare contributed 14 points, four assists and three rebounds. The point guard fed the ball to the hot hand, as junior Xavier Lovelace led all scorers with 29 points on the night.

Malatare shot 52.3% across the three game swing and went 15-18 at the free-throw line. The junior is averaging 20.4 points, 5.2 rebounds and 3.6 assists per game this season.

The recent victories improved Eastern's record to 14-10 on the year, sitting at sixth in the Cascade Collegiate Conference standings. The Mountaineers are set to travel this weekend, facing Walla Walla on Feb. 4 and Lewis-Clark State on Feb. 5. Eastern previously defeated Walla Walla 88-70 on Dec. 18 and lost to Lewis-Clark State 76-72 on Dec. 17.

### ON THE SLATE

#### THURSDAY, FEB. 3

**Prep girls basketball**  
Joseph at Griswold, 6 p.m.  
Nixyaawii vs. Crane, Baker High School, 6 p.m.

**Prep boys basketball**  
Joseph at Griswold, 7:30 p.m.  
Nixyaawii vs. Crane, Baker High School, 7:30 p.m.

#### FRIDAY, FEB. 4

**College women's basketball**  
Eastern Oregon at Walla Walla, noon

**College men's basketball**  
Eastern Oregon at Walla Walla, 2 p.m.

**College baseball**  
Eastern Oregon at Linfield, 2 p.m.

**Prep girls basketball**  
Stanfield at Union, 5:30 p.m.  
Chiawana at Hermiston, 5:45 p.m.  
Echo at Sherman, 6 p.m.  
Heppner at Enterprise, 6 p.m.  
Griswold at Elgin, 6 p.m.  
Burns at Irrigon, 6 p.m.  
Nixyaawii at Wallowa, 6 p.m.  
Weston-McEwen at Pilot Rock, 6 p.m.  
Vale at Riverside, 6 p.m.  
Nyssa at Umatilla, 6 p.m.  
Hood River Valley at Pendleton, 7 p.m.

**Prep boys basketball**  
Hood River Valley at Pendleton, 5:30 p.m.  
Stanfield at Union, 7 p.m.  
Echo at Sherman, 7:30 p.m.  
Chiawana at Hermiston, 7:30 p.m.  
Heppner at Enterprise, 7:30 p.m.  
Griswold at Elgin, 7:30 p.m.  
Burns at Irrigon, 7:30 p.m.  
McLoughlin at Baker, 7:30 p.m.  
Nixyaawii at Wallowa, 7:30 p.m.  
Weston-McEwen at Pilot Rock, 7:30 p.m.  
Vale at Riverside, 7:30 p.m.  
Nyssa at Umatilla, 7:30 p.m.

**SATURDAY, FEB. 5**  
**College baseball**  
Eastern Oregon at Linfield, 1 p.m.

**College women's basketball**  
Blue Mountain at Columbia Basin, 2 p.m.  
Eastern Oregon at Lewis-Clark State, 3 p.m.

**College men's basketball**  
Blue Mountain at Columbia Basin, 4 p.m.  
Eastern Oregon at Lewis-Clark State, 5 p.m.

**College women's wrestling**  
Eastern Oregon at Southern Oregon, 6 p.m.

**College men's wrestling**  
Eastern Oregon at Southern Oregon, 7 p.m.

**Prep girls basketball**  
Burns at Riverside, 1:30 p.m.  
Echo at Bickleton, 2 p.m.  
Vale at Umatilla, 3 p.m.  
Hermiston at Walla Walla, 3 p.m.  
Nyssa at Irrigon, 3 p.m.  
Heppner at Union, 4 p.m.  
Griswold at Wallowa, 4 p.m.  
Joseph at Nixyaawii, 4 p.m.  
Pilot Rock at Stanfield, 4 p.m.

**Prep boys basketball**  
Vale at Umatilla, 2:30 p.m.  
Burns at Riverside, 3 p.m.  
Echo at Bickleton, 3:30 p.m.  
Nyssa at Irrigon, 4:30 p.m.  
Hermiston at Walla Walla, 5 p.m.  
Heppner at Union, 5:30 p.m.  
Griswold at Wallowa, 5:30 p.m.  
Joseph at Nixyaawii, 5:30 p.m.  
Pilot Rock at Stanfield, 5:30 p.m.

**Prep boys wrestling**  
Heppner, Pendleton, Echo/Stanfield, Hermiston, Irrigon, McLoughlin/Weston-McEwen, Pine Eagle, Riverside at Bank of Eastern Oregon Invitational, TBA