

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

Hermiston's Ben Larson ranked No. 1 heading into state

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Ben Larson may not have been born wearing a wrestling singlet, but it didn't take long for him to gravitate to the wrestling mat.

Now, the Hermiston sophomore is ranked No. 1 at 160 pounds heading to the 3A state wrestling tournament Friday and Saturday, Feb. 18-19, at the Tacoma Dome in Tacoma, Washington.

"We'd been waiting for him," Hermiston coach Kyle Larson said. "He transitioned from the middle school program to high school pretty easily. He was a club guy, and we build our high school program with our youth program."

Larson heads into state with a 33-5 record and 13 pins. He won the Mid-Columbia Conference district title, and Washington Interscholastic Activities Association Region 4 Regional Tournament title.

"He's one of those guys who steps on the mat and flips a switch," coach Larson said. "He's ready to fight."

The Bulldogs will send 11 wrestlers to state. Larson has a bye in the first round of state, as do 11 others who already are in the round of 16.

Being ranked No. 1 is something Larson doesn't see in himself, but he appreciates the recognition.

"I guess when you look at yourself, you see flaws," he said. "It's a different perspective when others rank you."

It's the first state tournament for Larson, whose freshman season was shortened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"That year wasn't a good measurement," said Larson, who finished 15-5 last season. "This year has gone really well, definitely better than I thought."

The same goes for the rest of the Bulldogs headed to state. Of the 11 headed to Tacoma, six were in the regional finals, with Larson and Cadenas winning titles.

"We have put in the work," coach Larson said. "It's all practice until now. District, regionals and state is the ultimate goal. State is the pinnacle of the year — that's what we'll be judged on. They have worked hard for this. We will do what we need to do."

Born to be a wrestler

Wrestling runs in the Larson family. Ben's dad, Jeremy, may be a mild mannered dentist now, but in high school and college he was a force to be reckoned with.

In high school, Jeremy won state titles as a junior (152) and a senior (160). He had a high school career record of 120-21, including 43-0 with 30 pins as a senior. He went to state all four years, placing three times.

Jeremy and his younger brother Kyle also were on the first Hermiston team to win a state team title in 2001.

Since then, the Bulldogs have won 10 state team titles, with the final one coming in 2016, the first year Kyle took over the program.

Jeremy also helped Oregon State win the Pac-10 title in 2007. It was the first Pac-10 title for the Beavers since 1994. He also went to the National Collegiate Athletic Association Tournament three times (2005-07), but did not place.

"I got close my senior year," Jeremy said. "I need to win one more match to be an All-American."

Jeremy and Kyle also won team awards at OSU.

Jeremy earned both the Beaver Award for Leadership and the

Strength and Conditioning "BLAST" Award in 2006, while Kyle won the Chad Flack Memorial Award for Most Improved Wrestler.

Ben started wrestling when he was 6 years old. His dad is impressed with how well he has done in two years.

"I think he's better than me when I was a sophomore," Jeremy said. "He is having success and I am happy for him. He has two more years to get as good as he can get and see what that means for him."

Not only does Ben have his uncle for a coach, but his dad gives him a few pointers as well.

"Wrestling runs in the family," Ben said. "I will do what I can, and dad gives me helpful hints here and there. I definitely look up to my dad. Having that experience is very helpful."

When Ben was in grade school and middle school, he loved going to the high school matches.

"It was a great experience," he said. "Hermiston has a wrestling environment, and it's what I have grown up with."

Ben also plays football and participates in track for the Bulldogs, but wrestling is his one true love.

"Wrestling is less of a game and more of a lifestyle," he said.



Photos by Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Hermiston's Ben Larson wrestles Jackson Hale, of Mt. Spokane, Saturday, Feb. 12, 2022, in the semifinal round of the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association 3A Region 4 tournament at Hermiston High School. Larson won by major decision 11-0.

EOU MEN'S WRESTLING

Mountaineers ranked No. 16 ahead of CCC championships

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Eastern Oregon University men's wrestling team moved up three spots in the latest National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics Coaches' Poll, coming in at No. 16 in the association's announcement Feb. 9.

The Mountaineers received 45 votes in the poll, and improvement from 44 votes received in last week's rendition.

Eastern saw three wrestlers earn individual rankings in the latest update. Senior Noel Orozco earned the No. 4 ranking at the 285-pound division. Sophomore Kyle Knudston (184) was also ranked No. 4 in his division, while senior Keegan Mulhill (174) came in at No. 11 in the country.

The Mountaineers are coming off a hard-fought dual victory over rival Southern Oregon, in which Eastern won 21-20.

Eastern is one of four ranked Cascade Collegiate Conference programs in the latest poll, alongside Montana State-Northern at No. 8, Menlo College at No. 9 and Embry-Riddle at No. 19.

As the team gears up for the postseason, Eastern will have another week off before traveling to Havre, Montana, for the Cascade Collegiate Conference Championships. The two day-event is set to begin on Friday, Feb. 18.

ON THE SLATE

THURSDAY, FEB. 17

Girls basketball

Big Sky League playoffs: Echo at Trout Lake, TBD
GOL District playoffs: McLoughlin at La Grande, TBD
Big Sky League playoffs: South Wasco County at Lone/Arlington (in Arlington), 6 p.m.

FRIDAY, FEB. 18

Prep girls basketball

Nixyaawii vs. TBD at OOL Tournament, Baker High School, 6 p.m.
Blue Mountain Conference district playoffs: Stanfield vs. Enterprise, Pendleton Convention Center, 2:45 p.m.
MCC/GSL District 8 tournament: Hermiston vs. Mead, Spokane Arena, 3:30 p.m.
The Dalles at Pendleton, 5:30 p.m.
Blue Mountain Conference district playoffs: Heppner vs. Grant Union, Pendleton Convention Center, 1 p.m.
Blue Mountain Conference district playoffs: Weston-McEwen vs. Pilot Rock/Grant Union, Pendleton Convention Center, 6 p.m.
EOL district championship game: Umatilla at Vale, 6 p.m. (MT)
The Dalles at Pendleton, 7 p.m.

Prep boys and girls wrestling

Hermiston at Mat Classic XXXIII, Tacoma, 10 a.m.

College men's basketball

Eastern Oregon at Multnomah, 7:30 p.m.

College women's basketball

Eastern Oregon at Multnomah, 5:30 p.m.

Eastern Oregon at Multnomah, 5:30 p.m.

College men's wrestling
Eastern Oregon at Cascade Collegiate Conference Championships, Havre, Montana, TBA

SATURDAY, FEB. 19

Prep girls basketball

Blue Mountain Conference district playoffs: Union vs. Stanfield/Enterprise, Pendleton Convention Center, 7:45 p.m.

Prep boys basketball

Blue Mountain Conference district playoffs: Heppner vs. Stanfield/Union, Pendleton Convention Center, 6 p.m.

Prep boys and girls wrestling

Hermiston at Mat Classic XXXIII, Tacoma, 10 a.m.

Prep boys wrestling

Irrigon, Riverside at 3A Special District 1 Tournament, Nyssa, TBD
Heppner/Ione, Echo/Stamfield at Special District 4 Championships, Adrian, 10 a.m.

College men's basketball

Wenatchee Valley at Blue Mountain, 4 p.m.
Eastern Oregon at Warner Pacific, 5 p.m.

College women's basketball

Wenatchee Valley at Blue Mountain, 2 p.m.
Eastern Oregon at Warner Pacific, 3 p.m.

College baseball

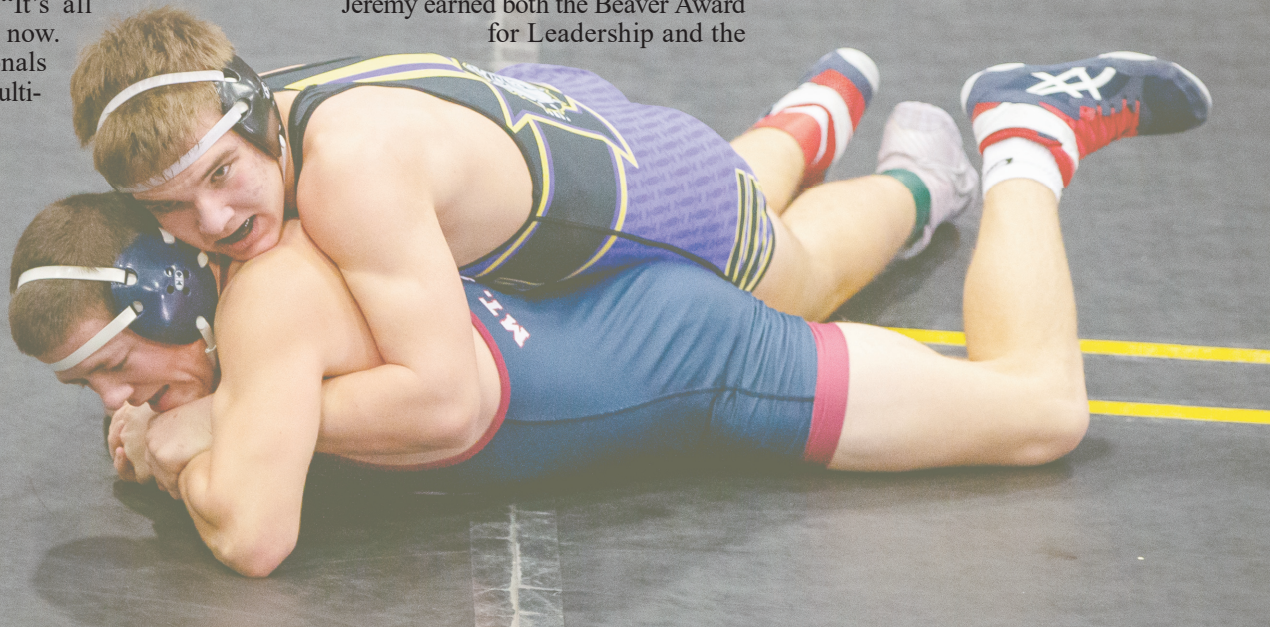
Eastern Oregon at Western Oregon (2), noon

College men's wrestling

Eastern Oregon at Cascade Collegiate Conference Championships, Havre, Montana, TBA

College women's lacrosse

Willamette at Eastern Oregon, 1 p.m.



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