

Wrestling:

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"It was such a big moment," he said. "Something I had been dreaming of for a long time. Then I went out and beat him. It was exciting."

If you think Gribskov's win was huge, it played a big part in helping the Bulldogs finish second in the team standings.

Hermiston, Mt. Spokane and University were tied for second with 162 points each heading into the finals. After Gribskov won, the Bulldogs trailed University by a half a point — 167.5-167.

"Coach told me after the match that it was huge," he said. "If I didn't win that match, Sam would have had to get a fall."

Cadenas, ranked No. 1 at 285, put an exclamation point on the weekend with his win. It boosted Hermiston into second place.

"Sam had a little bit tighter match than I anticipated," Larson said. "He (Bowers) was a big guy, he was hard to get out of his stance. Sam has wrestled a number of big guys this year, he gets them moving, tires them out and finds ways to score. We were nervous. He was in the state finals and team scores were close."

For Cadenas, it was just another day at the office.

Cadenas took Bowers down twice in the match, and earned an escape. Bowers earned his three points off two escapes and a second stalling call on Cadenas.

"I thought he was good, but at the same time I felt like I could have done better," said Cadenas, who finished

third as a sophomore at 220 pounds. "I came out with the win, that's what matters. I felt like that (No. 1) ranking was meant to say something. I was there for a reason and I showed that today. I want to thank God, all my coaches, my team, my family and everyone that supported me throughout this journey."

Larson could not have been happier for his big man.

"Sam was excited," Larson said. "He came and gave us a big hug in the corner and went right to his teammates. Sam had a great season. He just got the job done. It's nice to know that the lifting and running and getting up early pays off."

The Bulldogs took 11 men to state and earned points from every man but one. Freshman Carlos Cervantes broke a finger in his first match and was unable to compete the rest of the weekend.

Also placing for the Bulldogs were Jessey Valley (3rd, 220), Ben Larson (5th, 160), Jaysen Rodriguez (5th, 126), Aiden Favorite (5th, 120), Daniel Garza (6th, 132) and Hunter Dyer (7th, 138).

"Every guy stepped up," Larson said.

Girls tournament

Senior Eseta Sepeni, in just her second year of wrestling, became the first female wrestler from Hermiston to place at state.

Wrestling at 235 pounds, Sepeni finished third, winning three loser-out matches to reach the podium.

Sepeni beat Allaina Cox of White River 3-1 in the third-place match. She earned all three of her points in the second period with an escape and a takedown.

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"I think that we grew a lot in our mental toughness," Kemp said. "There have been some huge hurdles, but we've learned a ton and I think we'll be able to draw on that as we move forward."

Tip-off against Lewis-Clark State is set for 7 p.m. in Lewiston, Idaho on Feb. 23 in Portland.

"The guys have a mentality of just being road dogs, which is what we call it," Kemp said. "We have to go be the same team on the road as we are here."

Women's team among conference elites

The Mountaineers women's team did not get off to an ideal start, but conference play presented Eastern with a chance to rise to the top.


The team began the year 2-5, but rallied to a 21-9 record at the conclusion of the regular season. Eastern has remained among the top three in the

Cascade Collegiate Conference, alongside Lewis-Clark State and Southern Oregon.

Eastern finished the season as the No. 3 seed heading into the Cascade Collegiate Tournament. The Mountaineers have clinched home-court advantage in the quarterfinal round and will face Warner Pacific at Quinn Coliseum on Feb. 22. Tip-off is slated for 7 p.m.




For some teams, home and away makes little difference. For Eastern, Quinn Coliseum has been a nightmare for opposing women's basketball teams coming in to play the Mountaineers. Eastern compiled a 10-1 record at home this year, while going 7-4 on the road.


The Mountaineers have relied on a three-pronged scoring attack this year. Junior Sailor Liefke has led Eastern with 15.4 points and 3.3 assists per game, while senior Taylor Stricklin is averaging 13.4 points and 8.4 rebounds per game. Freshman Adyson Harris has been a pleasant addition to Eastern's rotation, averaging 12 points and 4.5 rebounds per contest.



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