

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

TUESDAY, APRIL 5, 2022

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A9

GLORY DAYS

Irrigon players reminisce about 1955 district championship

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

IRRIGON — They strolled up to the high school wearing their still pristine letterman's sweaters, books of memories in hand, and tales as tall as 6-foot-6 center Joe Mann.

Two members of Irrigon's 1955 7-B District Championship team visited Irrigon High School on Friday, April 1, wanting to get another look at their trophy, and take a walk down memory lane.

"It's been so long since I've seen this," Mann said as his 83-year-old hands held the trophy.

Mann and Cliff Ballard, 82, were two of the six members of the championship team that Grant Schiewe coached. When they attended Irrigon, the high school was down behind the A.C. Houghton Elementary School.

"The last time we saw it, the gym floor was warped," Ballard said. "I think it had water damage."

The Morrow County School District still owns the old school building, built in 1921. The school colors were black and orange, and the mascot was the Comets, which dates to 1904.

The former teammates marveled at the new school and gym, which is grand in comparison to their old stomping grounds.

"The bleachers were only about three rows up," said Ballard, who lives in Desert Aire, Washington. "This is nice."

The 1955 district title was the first the Comets won and holds special memories for the players.

"There were only six of us, but I don't remember that being a problem," said Mann, who made the trip from McMinnville.

Other team members included Ival Sullivan, who died in February, the late Dale Shingledecker, Ken Edwards of Pendleton and Sam Burke, whose whereabouts are unknown to his former teammates.

Mann was a junior center on the team, while Ballard was a sophomore, but had earned a starting guard position.

"I just fed him the ball," Ballard said of Mann.

An inquiry as to the lack of players on the team was hit with a hilarious reply from Mann. He quickly asked for it not to be printed, but it will forever be remembered.

The Irrigon Comets were around from 1904 to 1959, when the students were sent to Boardman. Irrigon opened its own high school once again in 2006, and they



Annie Fowler/East Oregonian
Joe Mann, left, and Cliff Ballard pose Friday, April 1, 2022, with the 7-B District Championship trophy they helped the Irrigon Comets win in 1955.



Contributed Photo
Members of the 1955 Irrigon Comets 7-B District Championship team from left are Cliff Ballard, Ken Edwards, Dale Shingledecker, Joe Mann, Sam Burke, Ival Sullivan and coach Grant Schiewe.

became the Knights.

A season to remember

The Comets got plenty of press in 1955 with Mann at the forefront. In high school he was 6-6 and dominated play on the court. He got recognition from the East Oregonian on a weekly basis, and by The Oregonian after he scored more than 50 points in a game.

Irrigon went 6-9 during the regular season with two losses each to Ione, Echo and St. Joe's.

Mann scored 283 points in the Comets' first 15 games, and averaged 22.9 points in seven league games. At the time, Schiewe was quoted as saying, "Joe has been more valuable to us because of his defense and rebounding than his scoring."

During the regular season, Mann scored 53 points in a 76-59 victory over Touchet, Washington. He had 50 points at halftime and played just three quarters. It was the Class B scoring record at the time.

The Comets were the No. 4 team heading into the 7-B District Tournament. The media labeled them the Cinderella team.

The underdog Comets opened district with a 56-48 win over Athena, then moved on to play Echo, which had beaten them earlier in the season 72-37 and 66-52.

against Prairie City, with the winner advancing to the state B tournament.

Irrigon won the first game 66-62, then dropped the next two 61-57 and 79-62.

While Mann certainly was the star of the show, he and Ballard agreed that Edwards was the floor leader.

"Ken was always under control emotionally," Ballard said. "He would bring the ball down and we knew he would get things set up. He was a quiet guy that settled us down to do what we needed to do."

Empty pages

The scrapbook that preserved the 1955 season had several blank pages after the season was over.

Mann was a senior in 1956, but said they must not have been very good because he could not recall anything memorable.

The powers that be at Oregon Hoops History were able to help us out, and Mann was wrong.

Mann posted one of the all-time great seasons in 1955-56, scoring 719 points in 21 games (34 points per game). It also was the final season of the narrow key, which was widened from 6 feet to 12 feet the following year.

He also scored 53 points his senior year in a 61-59 loss to Ione. Shingledecker scored the other six points.

He finished his high school career with 1,859 points.

Mann also played football, and ran track and played baseball in the spring. He threw the discus and shot put and did the long jump in track, and was a pitcher and first baseman.

After high school, Mann went to Oregon State for one year and played on the rookie team. He then spent four years in the Navy, and returned to Oregon State when he was discharged.

He redshirted his first season back with the Beavers and coach Slats Gill in 1962-63. The Beavers went to the 1963 NCAA Tournament — a team that included Terry Baker and Mel Counts. They reached the Final Four, but lost to top-ranked Cincinnati 80-46.

"After that season, I didn't play again," said Mann, who got his college degree 30 years after he started.

After high school, Ballard went on to play tennis at Everett Junior College, and later worked in the paint industry.

Ballard went to the state tennis tournament one year, but did not place. His biggest win came in a non-league match over Hermiston's Dave Griffin, who had been a district champion the year before.

It's been 67 years since the Comets won their district title, but the years do not wipe away the memories. After their visit, they might have a few new ones for their scrapbooks.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian
Pendleton's Andy Oja races to a win in the 110-meter high hurdles with a time of 15.45 seconds at the Clay Lewis Invite at Hanford High School on Saturday, April 2, 2022. Albersh Kuwa (left) took second with a personal record of 15.62.

Sports highlights

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

RICHLAND — Andy Oja won both hurdles events, and Reilly Lovercheck won the long jump and placed second in three events as Pendleton made a strong showing Saturday, April 2, at the Clay Lewis Invite at Hanford High School.

Kamiakin won the boys team title with 157.83 points, with Hanford second at 139.5. Pendleton was fifth with 55.33 points.

Kamiakin also won the girls title, with Southridge right behind with 137 points. Pendleton was fourth with 74 points.

Oja turned in a time of 15.45 seconds to win the 110 hurdles, more than a second faster than the second-place finisher. In the 300 hurdles, Oja ran a personal best 42 seconds.

Lovercheck soared 16-0 ¾ to win the long jump, then placed second in the 300 hurdles (50.96), 100 hurdles (16.94), and went 34-9 ½ in the triple jump, which ranks her fifth in the school's record book.

Nessa Neveau threw a personal best of 96-6 to place fifth in the javelin, while Kelsey Lovercheck cleared 9 feet in the pole vault for third place, and Muriel Hoisington was third in the long jump (15-2 ¾).

BMCC brings in 9 runs to split doubleheader

PENDLETON — The Blue Mountain Community College Timberwolves split their Northwest Athletic Conference East doubleheader on Saturday, April 2, with the Big Bend Community College Vikings of Moses Lake, Washington, to improve to 4-6 in East play.

Playing in Pendleton, the BMCC lost the first game 16-6. In the opener, Kennedy Robertson hit a grand slam for BMCC in the third inning.

In the second game, the teams were locked 1-1 after three innings. Big Bend scored one in the top of the fourth, while BMCC answered with nine runs to pull away. Elizabeth Tuholski pitched a complete game for the win.

ON THE SLATE

TUESDAY, APRIL 5

Prep baseball
Pendleton vs. Bend, at Hood River, 2 p.m.
Enterprise at Heppner/Ione (2), 2 p.m.
Riverside at Stanfield/Echo, 4 p.m.
Union at Weston-McEwen, 4 p.m.
Hermiston at Southridge, 4 p.m.
Grant Union at Heppner, 4:30 p.m.
La Grande JV at Irrigon, 7 p.m.

Prep softball
Pilot Rock at Union (2), 3 p.m.
La Grande JV at Irrigon, 4 p.m.
Umatilla at Riverside, 4 p.m.
McLoughlin at Pendleton, 4:30 p.m.

Boys soccer
Walla Walla at Hermiston, 7 p.m.

Prep tennis
Weston-McEwen at Umatilla, 3:30 p.m.
Stanfield/Echo at Riverside, 4:30 p.m.

Track and field
Heppner at Grant Union, 4 p.m.

Prep golf
Pendleton girls at Prineville Country Club, 11 a.m.

College softball
Treasure Valley at Blue Mountain (2), 2 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6

Prep baseball
Baker/Powder Valley at McLoughlin (2), 2 p.m.

Prep softball
Baker at McLoughlin (2), 2 p.m.

Prep tennis
Redmond boys at Pendleton, 3 p.m.
Pendleton girls at Redmond, 3 p.m.

College baseball
Yakima Valley at Blue Mountain (2), 1 p.m.

THURSDAY, APRIL 7

Prep softball
Umatilla at Pendleton JV, 4 p.m.

Prep golf
Heppner Invitational, Willow Creek Country Club, 1 p.m.

Prep tennis
Sherman at Irrigon 2 p.m.
Riverside at Weston-McEwen, 3:30 p.m.
Stanfield/Echo at Umatilla, 4:30 p.m.

Prep lacrosse
Hermiston at Mount Si, 7 p.m.

SPORTS SHORT

EOU Blue and Gold Weekend set to return to La Grande

The Observer

LA GRANDE — After a two-year postponement due to the coronavirus pandemic, Eastern Oregon University will host its Blue and Gold Weekend on campus.

The community event is scheduled to begin on Friday, May 13, and conclude May 14. The weekend is geared toward community outreach and a gath-

ering of current students and alumni.

"It's about building connections and engagements with our community, alumni and students," Athletic Director Anji Weissenfluh said in the university's announcement.

The two-day event includes fun for all ages, with live music, spike ball tournaments, barbecue, cornhole and more. Alumni will compete in a soccer game,

and the football team will host a spring scrimmage.

Blue Mountain Summit Realty Group and Fairway Mortgage are sponsoring this year's Blue and Gold Weekend.

The university's athletic department will be fundraising through a silent auction in the tailgate zone on campus — the items set to be auctioned off have been donated to the Eastern Oregon athletic department.



Eastern Oregon University/Contributed Photo, File
Fans pack the stands at Community Stadium at Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, in this October 2016 photo. After a two-year postponement due to the coronavirus pandemic, EOU host its Blue and Gold Weekend on campus May 13 and 14, 2022.