

# EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

THURSDAY, MAY 5, 2022

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A10

## READY FOR THE NEXT CHAPTER

### Hermiston's Baker will play volleyball at Lower Columbia

By ANNIE FOWLER  
East Oregonian

**H**ERMISTON — A last-minute invitation to an open gym at Lower Columbia College led to an opportunity to play college volleyball for Hermiston senior Kambree Baker.

"They said, 'Can you be here tomorrow? There's an open gym and campus tour,'" Baker said. "I was a little skeptical, but once we started, we were playing at a high level and we were having fun. The culture really wowed me in that one visit. I knew it was where I was meant to be. My mom (Tricia Mooney) said she could tell I liked it there by the way I played out there. I've wanted to play college volleyball for so long."

A conversation with the coaches led to an offer she could not refuse. Lower Columbia coach Carri Smith said Baker's positive energy is what first caught her attention.

"She came in with a 'no fear' attitude as a newbie in my open gym and owned her position with class and ease," Smith said. "She showed her strength as a middle hitter, putting away most balls she was given, and did a good job reading the setters to get a good jump on her block. She also got along really well with everyone in the gym. Her energy and personality just clicked with everyone on the court."

Despite the glowing review, Smith said the 5-foot-11 Baker will have to battle for playing time this season.

"She will be fighting with two other returning middle hitters (Jayden Foster and Olivia Kelzenberg) for time on the court," Smith



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

**Hermiston's Kambree Baker blocks against Kennewick on Oct. 12, 2021, at the Dawg House in Hermiston. Baker has signed to play volleyball at Lower Columbia College.**

said. "She is the only incoming freshman in that position."

Baker said she has no problem earning her playing time.

"I'm a fighter," she said. "I'm a competitor. It fuels your determination and drive to get better."

The Red Devils, who compete in the Northwest Athletic Conference West, finished 12-10 overall and 7-5 in the West standings the past fall. They finished their season with losses to Lane Community College and Whatcom Community College at the NWAC Volleyball Championships in November.

Under coach Carri Smith, Lower Columbia has been to the NWAC Championships seven out of the past eight years (there was no tournament in 2021 because of the coronavirus). The Red Devils won the NWAC title in 2016 and were fifth in 2017 and 2018.

Baker also went on visits to Columbia Basin College, Blue Mountain Community College and Oregon Institute of Technology, but it was LCC that felt like the perfect fit.

"I heard about finding the right fit, but I really didn't know it was a thing," Baker said. "Then I went on my visit. It's a real thing. I really liked the coaches and how they marketed the program to me. I'm really excited."

Baker wants to major in dental hygiene, and LCC offers a pre-dental hygiene program that gives students a solid foundation in the basic sciences required for the field.

"Then I will transfer and finish my degree," Baker said. "Where will depend if I want to keep on playing."

#### A love for the sport

Baker has been playing volleyball since the fourth grade when she lived in Pendleton.

"I moved to Hermiston just before seventh grade and I played in middle school," Baker said. "I've always gravitated toward it. I love the team atmosphere and playing with girls who become your best friends. It's always been so much fun for me."

After her final year of middle

school volleyball, Baker started playing club ball with the Eastern Heat. After two years, she moved up to the Shockwave, and now she plays for Club Gold 18 Blue out of the Tri-Cities.

"When I got to high school, I was playing club year round," Baker said. "I love playing on the Club Gold team. Playing club elevates your love of play so much."

During her senior season with the Bulldogs, Baker dived for a ball during a match at Kennewick High School and hurt her right hand.

"I played a couple of more matches and it still hurt," she said. "Trainer Dan (Emery) said I should get an X-ray. It showed I broke a bone on the outside of my hand."

Baker got a hard brace to wear off the court, but had to wear a soft brace on the court during matches.

"I had to hit with my left hand," Baker said. "It made me grow as a player. I gained a lot of court awareness. It was a blessing in disguise."

Baker finished her senior season with 112 kills, eight solo blocks and 30 block assists.

"With all the obstacles thrown at Kambree in her senior year, she fought through them with resilience and grit," Hermiston coach Megan Bunn said. "She learned to be versatile and to work with anything that was thrown at her. I will continue to reference her as a player with both heart and the volleyball skills that the future girls in my program should strive to be."

Baker also participates in track at Hermiston, and is a big fan of Emilee Strot's weight training class.

"The weight class has been the best part of my high school career," Baker said. "Coach Strot is just phenomenal. I feel 10 times more prepared and confident in myself as an athlete and a young woman. There is a confidence and a power. You know what you are doing in the weight room and you can handle yourself. It's very empowering."

Baker will graduate June 9, head off for a family vacation in Mexico, then it's back to work.

"I've got to get ready for my next chapter," she said.

### ON THE SLATE

Schedule is subject to change

#### THURSDAY, MAY 5

**Prep baseball**  
Pilot Rock at Sherman, 4 p.m.

**Boys soccer**  
Hermiston at Southridge, 7 p.m.

**Prep tennis**  
Stanfield/Echo at Four Rivers, 3 p.m.

#### FRIDAY, MAY 6

**Prep baseball**  
Irrigon at Burns (2), 1 p.m.  
Riverside at Nyssa (2), 1 p.m. (MT)  
Umatilla at Joseph (2), 1 p.m.  
Ridgeview at Pendleton (2), 3 p.m.

**Prep softball**  
Umatilla at Enterprise (2), 1 p.m.  
Riverside at Nyssa (2), 1 p.m. (MT)  
Irrigon at Burns (2), 1 p.m.  
Echo/Stanfield at Heppner/lone (2), 1 p.m.  
Pilot Rock at Elgin (2), 2 p.m.  
Pendleton at Ridgeview (2), 3 p.m.

**Prep golf**  
Heppner, Echo at Enterprise Invite, Alpine Meadows Golf Club, 10 a.m.

**Track and field**  
Hermiston at Richland Twilight, Hanford, TBD  
Irrigon, McLoughlin, Pendleton, Riverside, Stanfield/Echo, Umatilla, Weston-McEwen at Baker Invite, 10 a.m.  
lone at Pirate Invite, Bickleton, 3:30 p.m.

**Prep tennis**  
Pendleton at Sherman, 3 p.m.  
lone/Heppner at Stanfield/Echo, TBD

**Prep lacrosse**  
Richland at Hermiston, 7:30 p.m.

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

#### SATURDAY, MAY 7

**Prep baseball**  
Heppner at Stanfield/Echo (2), 11 a.m.  
Pilot Rock at Dufur (2), 11 a.m.  
Grant Union at Weston-McEwen (2), 11 a.m.

**Prep softball**  
Weston-McEwen at Grant Union (2), noon

**Boys soccer**  
District 8 tournament: Hermiston at Mead, noon

**Track and field**  
Griswold, Heppner, lone at Condon Invitational, 1 p.m.  
Pirate Senior Night Relays, Riverside, 4 p.m.

**College baseball**  
Columbia Basin at Blue Mountain (2), 1 p.m.

**College softball**  
Wenatchee Valley at Blue Mountain (2), noon

#### MONDAY, MAY 9

**Prep baseball**  
Irrigon at Pendleton JV, 4:30 p.m.

**Prep golf**  
Heppner, Echo at district championships, Birch Creek Golf Club, TBD  
Pendleton girls at district championships, Greenback at Heron Lakes, Portland, 10:40 a.m.

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Alicia Enriquez  
S19/21

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