

Hurdles:

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podium. Historic Hayward Field is pretty special. They talk about Hayward magic for a reason, You can feel it when you step out there. I ran at Hayward. It was incredible. You step on the track and feel like good things will happen. We are mentally preparing them that the moment is not too big for them, they earned the right to be there.”

Oja ranks fifth on the school leaderboard in the 300 hurdles at 39.95. Maher has the school record at 38.75.

In the 110s, Oja ranks eighth. Kelly Simpson holds the record at 14.46, set in 1999. Maher is second at 14.74.

“There are three guys at 15 seconds, and Andy’s best is 15.07,” Bradley said. “There are four guys who have run sub-15. We have been waiting for the sub-15. A good clean race and I think we will see 14.8 out of him. That will be fun to watch.”

Relay time

Oja will have a busy schedule at state with the hurdles and two relays.

Oja ran the third leg on the winning 4x100 team at the IMC district meet. He ran with Gabe Browning, Brock Mackey and Thaiden Cannin, turning in a time of 43.60, which ranks them third heading into state.

Sam Jennings typically runs the anchor leg, but was swapped out at the last minute because of a leg issue. As the top-ranked javelin thrower in the state, the Bucks want to make sure he is 100% for the state meet.

“I think we have a pretty good shot at winning it,” Bradley said. “We had to do a last minute substitution and throw Cannin in to take Sam’s spot. They went for it. Thaiden ran that anchor leg like a wolverine. We are fortunate to have a good stable of athletes. Any combination of the five athletes will do a good job.”

The 4x400 is a whole other story. Oja is not as fond of the longer race, but he runs it for the good of the team.

“I definitely like the 4x100 better than the 4x400,” he said. “No one thinks the 4x400 is a fun race, and it’s right after the 300 hurdles. It adds another obstacle.”

The Bucks were second at district in the 4x400 behind Ridgeview. Their time of 3:31.05 is their best of the season, but ranks seventh among the 13 teams at state. Running with Oja were Trey Boston, James Thatcher and Cannin.

The way Oja sees it, if the Bucks perform like they are capable, a team trophy could be in their hands on the way home.

“We have quite the team this year,” he said. “We have a decent shot at doing something at state. It would be awesome to win that (team title).”

Bradley agrees. “These guys have been getting better and better all season long,” he said. “That has been a difference maker for us. Guys have been stepping up.”

Family ties

Not only was George Oja a runner, but he was a heck of a basketball player in his day.

A 1961 graduate of Astoria High school, he played basketball and ran track for the Fishermen. Nicknamed ‘Jumpin George,’ he earned All-Metro honors his junior and senior years.

He attended Pacific University, where he played basketball and ran track. A three-year letter winner on the track, he once held the school record in the mile at 4:20.

In the mid-1970s, he won the Nike Marathon in Eugene, and in 1983, he was ranked 18th in the United States in the marathon.

“He is kind of the family legend,” said Andy, who also played basketball for the Bucks. “He was more of a marathoner than anything. For me, 400 meters is about the max I will do.”

The Finnish family genes go deeper than athletics.

STATE TRACK COMPETITORS

Hayward Field, Eugene

1A GIRLS AND BOYS

Ellery Flerchinger, Griswold (discus); lone boys 4x100 relay (Thomas Rudolf, Gary Walls, Martin Medina, Cedrick Dayandante); Lewkus Burrigh, lone (discus).

2A BOYS

Theo White, Weston-McEwen (200); Isaiah Lemmon, Stanfield/Echo (400); Trevor Nichols, Heppner (800, 1500); Alex McIntyre, Weston-McEwen (800, 3000); Hobbs Hurty, Stanfield/Echo (800, 1500); Joe Sherman, Heppner (800, HJ); Jagjot Singh, Stanfield/Echo (3000); Skylar Jeffers, Pilot Rock (110H, 300H); Weston-McEwen 4x100 relay (Reece Ball, Theo White, Colson Hall, Cameron Reich); Weston-McEwen 4x400 relay (Aiden Wolf, Alex McIntyre, Cameron Reich, Theo White); Heppner 4x400 relay (Jacob Finch, Ed Ellsworth, Joe Sherman, Trevor Nichols); Anthony Keeney, Stanfield/Echo (shot put, discus); Carter Burnette, Stanfield/Echo (discus); Conor Brosnan, Heppner (discus); Caleb Sprenger, Weston-McEwen (javelin, HJ); Cameron Reich, Weston-McEwen (LJ); Anthony Nix, Weston-McEwen (TJ).

2A GIRLS

Lily Lindsey, Weston-McEwen (100, 200, HJ); Halle Hisler, Heppner (200, 400); Kelsey Graham, Weston-McEwen (400); Hannah Finch, Heppner (800, TJ); Jacque Kerns, Stanfield/Echo (800, HJ); Irelynn Kollman, Heppner (800, 1500); Arianna Worden, Heppner (1500); Saige Jensen, Heppner (3000); McKenna Bray, Pilot Rock (100H, HJ); Weston-McEwen 4x100 relay (Charli King, Kelsey Graham, Rose White, Lily Lindsey); Pilot Rock 4x100 relay (Aiva Ellis, Kyella Picard, Paige Moffit, Mersayus Hart); Heppner 4x400 relay (Arianna Worden, Irelynn Kollman, Halle Hisler, Hannah Finch); Weston-McEwen 4x400 relay (Charli King, Rose White, Brynn Brownie, Kelsey Graham); Emily Lambert, Pilot Rock (shot put, discus); Kyella Picard, Pilot Rock (shot put, javelin); Charli King, Weston-McEwen (PV); Emily Hancock, Stanfield/Echo (LJ); Charlei Harwood, Stanfield/Echo (TJ).

3A BOYS AND GIRLS

Pedro Chavez, Riverside (200, 400, HJ); Diego Magana, Riverside (400); Luis Campos, Umatilla (discus); Jozen Byers, Irrigon (PV); Julie Magana, Riverside (100, 300H); Taylor Durfey, Umatilla (shot put, discus, javelin); Crystal Sanchez, Riverside (LJ).

4A BOYS AND GIRLS

Johnny Koklich, McLoughlin (100, 200); David Hernandez, McLoughlin (800); Shaq Badillo, McLoughlin (shot put, discus); Luis Wolf, McLoughlin (HJ, LJ); Michael Doherty, McLoughlin (LJ, TJ); Kadey Brown, McLoughlin (shot put, discus); Star Badillo, McLoughlin (discus); Madi Perkins (javelin).

5A Boys

Brock Mackey, Pendleton (100, 200); Trey Boston, Pendleton (400); James Thatcher, Pendleton (800); Andy Oja, Pendleton (110H, 300); Drew Reyburn, Pendleton (110H, 300H, HJ); Thaiden Cannin, Pendleton (300H); Pendleton 4x100 relay (Gabe Browning, Brock Mackey, Andy Oja, Thaiden Cannin); Pendleton 4x400 relay (Trey Boston, James Thatcher, Andy Oja, Thaiden Cannin); Nathan Neveau, Pendleton (shot put, discus); Sam Jennings, Pendleton (javelin); Nolan Mead, Pendleton (HJ); Andrew Williams, Pendleton (PV); Ben Jennings, Pendleton (TJ).

5A GIRLS

Kelsey Lovercheck, Pendleton (200, PV); Muriel Hoisington, Pendleton (400); Reilly Lovercheck, Pendleton (100H, 300H, LJ, TJ); Pendleton 4x100 relay (Kelsey Lovercheck, Grace Pitner, Hadley Brown, Muriel Hoisington); Addison Kennedy, Pendleton (shot put); Chloe Gray, Pendleton (shot put); Jamie Gau, Pendleton (HJ); Shaelynn Silva, Pendleton (PV).

George Oja taught anatomy and physiology at Linfield University, and coached cross-country and track. He retired from coaching in 1993, and from teaching in 2003.

Andy’s parents, Eric and Emilee are both math teachers — Eric at the high school, and Emilee at the middle school.

Andy applied to, and was accepted at, MIT, Princeton, Brown and Columbia. He visited them all, and chose Princeton, where he will study mechanical aerospace engineering.

He has no immediate plans to join the track team, but said he might try to walk on once he gets a handle on his schoolwork.

Turkey:

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The Blue Mountain foothills provide cover, shade and nightly roosting trees while allowing safe access to the grain fields and grassy slopes along brushy creek bottoms.

Spotting a flock can be easy in the mornings and afternoons. Rio often stick to routine preferred covers within a home range that averages between 370 and 1,360 acres, according to the National Wild Turkey Federation, and learning a flock’s daily movement and whereabouts makes the right time and place two easy ingredients for success.

Just past five in the evening, a passel of toms and hens erupted in discordant gobbles and yelps up the canyon ahead. Like clockwork, the birds were stirring for their evening routine. Timber concealed them, so I kept watch over the open ridgelines. Fire had swept through about five years prior, thinning the timber and leaving open slopes with biscuitroot in full bloom and blackberry thickets leafing out in the draws.

A gray hen decoy stood off to my right. Over my left shoulder, I spied a red head pop up above the ridgeline, hundreds of yards distant. It was a lone tom and gut instinct whispered that I would come to know this bird well before the evening ended.

In the span of about 10 minutes, the tom worked his way down to a logging road that followed the canyon bottom. It was then that I decided to strike up a conversation. A series of questionable, high-pitched yelps drifted from my box call, which I had rigged to work in a pinch after busting a key component. The calls sent the cadre of love-sick gobblers into panic mode but the tom I had spotted first simply kept quiet, flipped a U-turn, and started in my direction. Wow, “Quiet Tom” is actually coming, I thought, nearly out loud.

The logging road suddenly became a turkey lek. Seven toms spewed from the timber onto the road, puffed up into full strut, sidled up to the ladies, and gobbled at every call. Hens began filing by and an old girl piped up with a unique rough voice like playing a güiro. The flock soon started my way, but “Quiet Tom” was ahead of them all. He had skirted the masses, popped out on the road below them, and spied my decoy.



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

An exquisite Rio tom heads toward the decoy.



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

The rich and varied colors of the Rio Grande wild turkey are worthy of viewing from every angle.

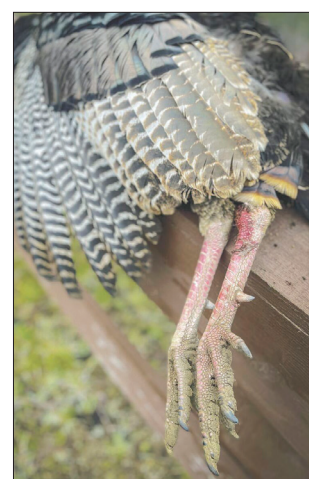
His black, rope-like beard bounced against his chest as he closed the distance. Preparing for action, I shifted slightly, disengaged the safety on my black Stevens 12-gauge and steadied the bead around the decoy. The brush pile I sat behind blocked me entirely from the end of the road. The only place a bird could get an eye on me was alongside the decoy, and by then it would be too late.

“Quiet Tom” reached 40 yards and pecked a few small gravels before committing to the decoy. A well-timed kissing sound caused him to stretch his neck out in curiosity. An eye-blink later, I stood to retrieve my first turkey of the year and gave thanks for the blessing of a stunning young tom.

What appeared to be

jet-black body feathers shone marvelous emerald, ruby, and bronze when rolled in the orange glow of the evening sun. His beard was twice the circumference and immaculately full compared to the other toms I had been watching. His spurs were short, only a half-inch or so, but as big around as a dime. His tail fan and rump feathers were flawless, possibly because he was a younger bird who avoided tussles with the older toms.

“I’m going to pretend that bird came to my calling,” I mentioned to my buddy Dean, who had filmed the hunt, knowing that the screeching from the box call would likely have cost me that bird had it been later in the season. Had I not called at all, it’s a safe bet that his evening routine would have brought



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

Every last detail of a wild turkey is interesting and beautiful. This bird has modest spurs but a scar on his leg and intricately-laid feather patterns.

him to me regardless.

I had watched this flock from the point of a lower ridge for two days and knew where and how they moved. The flock was roosting and sheltering in the canyon conifers and traveling the logging road morning, noon, and night. Thirteen toms were visible from my vantage and the seven that called that canyon home would take turns strutting in pairs in the opening at the end of the logging road. I set my hen decoy at the mouth of the road and slipped in behind the brush pile 30 yards adjacent while the birds loafed in the timber. It was a slam dunk.

Whether you are new to the game of gobblers or you have mastered sweet-talking the wisest old toms, scouting and patterning Rios can be an ace in the hole for bagging spring long-beards in the Blues.

Brad Trumbo is a fish and wildlife biologist and outdoor writer in Waitsburg, Washington. For tips and tales of outdoor pursuits and conservation, visit www.bradtrumbo.com.

Golf:

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City Market will be providing catering for the junior championship.

In addition to success on the course, last year’s tournament served as a boon for businesses and lodging in Union County. Hotels in Union and La Grande were booked full, hosting the golfers, their families and officials traveling to the Grande Ronde Valley for the event. According to Londin, The Lodge at Hot Lake Springs and the Historic Union Hotel have already booked a significant amount of guests for this year’s tournament.

The 2022 Eastern Oregon Junior Championship begins at 8 a.m. May 21, with groups of three teeing off every 10 minutes.



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer, File

Brody Grieb attempts a putt July 1, 2021, on the sixth hole at the 91st Bob Norquist Oregon Junior Amateur tournament at Buffalo Peak Golf Course in Union. The tournament returns to the course Saturday and Sunday, May 21 and 22, 2022.

“It’s a really good thing to have a lot of people coming from the Port-

land area and from across the state,” Londin said. “It’s great advertising for

everything our county has to offer and for our great golf course.”

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