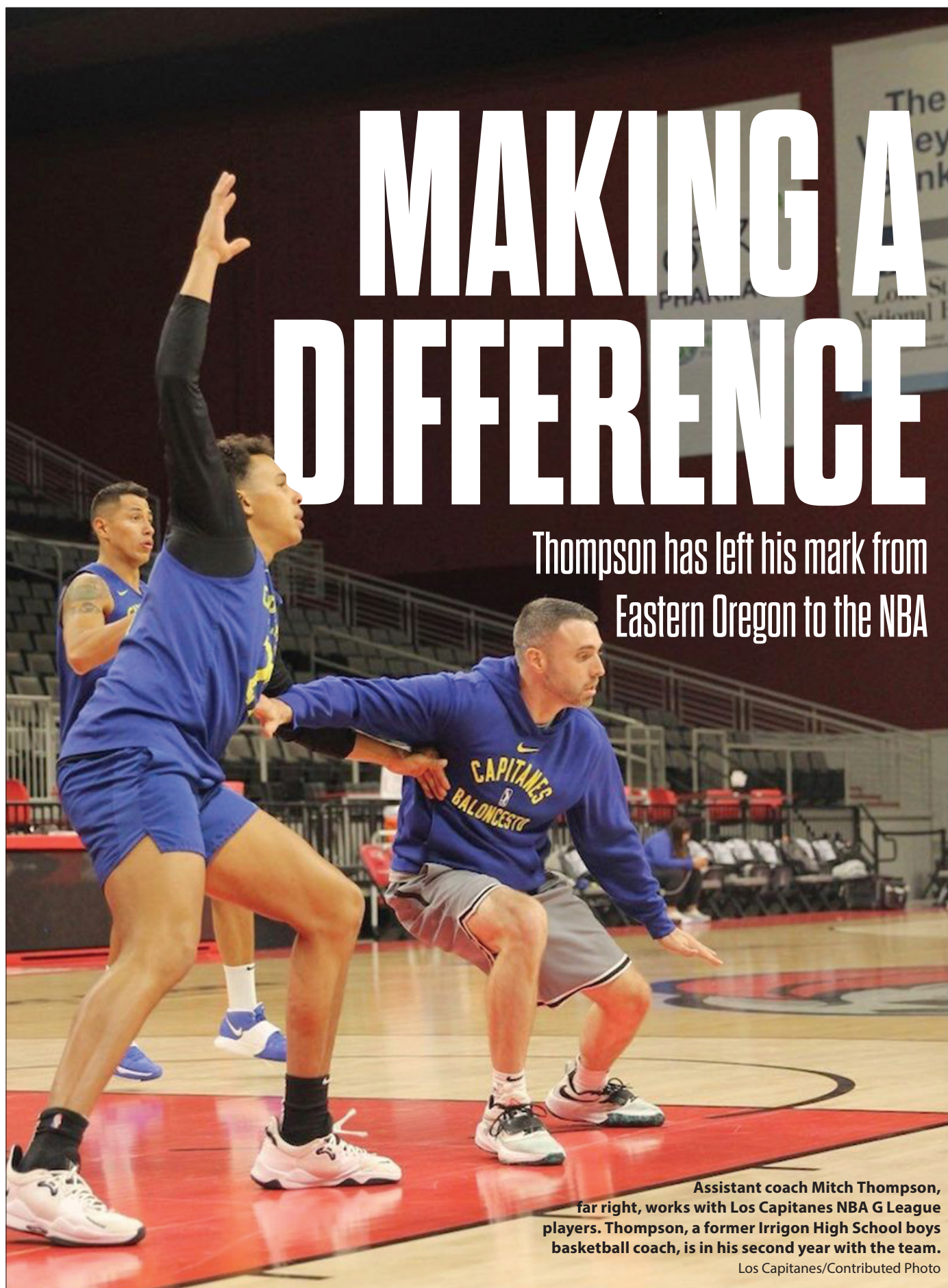


EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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B1



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Thompson has left his mark from Eastern Oregon to the NBA

Assistant coach Mitch Thompson, far right, works with Los Capitanes NBA G League players. Thompson, a former Irrigon High School boys basketball coach, is in his second year with the team.
Los Capitanes/Contributed Photo

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — If there is a basketball involved, Mitch Thompson wants to be in the thick of things.

The former Irrigon High School boys coach has gone from coaching middle school basketball to landing a job with NBA G League team Los Capitanes in Mexico City.

“When I was 5, I wanted to be a basketball coach,” Thompson said. “That side of the game has always fascinated me. It’s all relationship driven. It’s out of knowing that I care. It’s the foundation of everything.”

Thompson, 30, is entering his second season with the Los Capitanes, and also is working with the NBA Academy Latin America in San Luis Potosi in Mexico.

“When I took this job, Mitch was a perfect fit,” Los Capitanes General Manager Nick Lagios said. “I knew him when he did some work with Australia Basketball about four years ago. We kept in touch. He already lived in Mexico and he is bilingual.”

Lagios also believes the NBA Academy job was a good fit for Thompson.

“He’s a perfect fit for the NBA Academy and now will do it at the highest level with the top Latin American players,” Langios said. “Twenty to 23% percent of NBA players are from Latina America. He is an ambassador for basketball, in Mexico and for the Capitanes. Mitch is more than a basketball coach, and he’s critical to the Capitanes. It’s tough to find coaches like that.”

The NBA Academy offers an elite basketball training program that provides top high school-age prospects from Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, South America and Canada with a holistic approach to player development.

The program gives prospects the opportunity to learn the game from outside coaches who the NBA hires with professional, collegiate and international coaching experience.

Since opening in 2017, 22 NBA Academy Latin America participants — including female players — have committed to NCAA Division I programs.

The NBA Academy program globally, has seen 13 players sign professional contracts, including Josh Giddy (Oklahoma City Thunder).

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Bear hunt can yield a bear-sized bounty



GARY LEWIS

ON THE TRAIL

Back behind a screen of limbs, I saw the legs of a bear. Hidden by branches, I could see parts but not the whole. I knew it was a bear.

My thumb was on the safety. I saw nose and head, then foreleg, then lower half of the body. In an instant, the rifle was at my shoulder and I had the vitals in the cross-hair.

The trigger broke, the rifle crashed and the 165-grain Nosler AccuBond took the bear behind the shoulder.

Spinning, the bear smashed into an alder that shivered all the way to the top of the tree.

When the magazine was topped up, when the sounds of the forest returned, when the birds lit, cautious, in the treetops again, I counted steps, pushing the muzzle in front of me. Eleven paces. Fifteen paces to the edge of the clearing. Twenty-three steps to the bear.

A few of my friends are still grumbling. They didn’t draw deer or elk tags this year. I think the best antidote for the lack of a bear or elk tag is to go bear hunting. The season starts Aug. 1 and a hunter who bags a bear is likely saving a few elk calves and deer fawns for next year.



Jim Ward/Contributed Photo, File

Oregon’s bear hunting season starts Aug. 1, 2022.

In Oregon, a bear hunter can draw a tag for the two-month spring hunt and get a second tag over the counter for the fall bear season. My favorite time of the season is Aug. 15 through the second week of September, when berries are ripe and apples, pears and plums hang heavy in forgotten orchards.

Hunt bear for what it provides. Not only the meat — the burger, steaks and ribs — but a hide, a pelt or a rug and the claws and the skull, all of which can be preserved in one way or another to remember the moment, the animal.

One of the things we should preserve is the grease from the bear.

Put a block of the good, clean white fat in a pot and cook it on low till it turns to oil. Skim the cracklings off the top and pour the grease through cheesecloth or clean game bag fabric. I like to strain it four times. Now the fat is ready to freeze for future use for pie crusts, biscuits and doughnuts. Be sure to pick apples or berries after the bear hunt. There is nothing better than apple pie with a bear grease crust.

Bear grease can be used in treating salves, in hair and to lube muzzleloader barrels. And save the cracklings for the birds.

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Gary Lewis/Contributed Photo

When the fruit-laden lowland creek bottoms proved barren of bear, the hunters — Sam Pyke, standing, and Lucas Simpson — began to glass the high country.