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IRRIGON BASKETBALL



Irrigon High School's new boys basketball coach Mark Wyant on Tuesday, July 12, 2022, gets ready for a new season. Yasser Marte/East Oregonian



JAYSON JACOBY

ON THE TRAIL

Giving familiar peaks a fresh look

Mountains are boring. They just stand there, after all, insensate as the stones of which they are constructed.

But for the occasional volcanic eruption or landslide, mountains can hardly be said to move.

People, on the other hand, tend to get around.

We scurry about, hither and yon, even when our every detour into a gas station leaves us feeling as though we ought to have received an escrow statement in addition to a receipt.

Our itinerant nature does quite a lot, I think, to enrich the reputation of mountains. It also has much to do with our fascination and affinity for high places.

Certainly our mobility, which allows us to see mountains from every conceivable vantage point, infuses them with a compelling personality they otherwise would lack.

This is not to suggest, of course, that mountains never change.

Nature can remake a peak's visage rapidly, needing just a few minutes of waning sunlight to transform the dull white of a snow slope into the brilliant pink of alpenglow.

It is of course an optical illusion, but the Wallows, which I can see well from my driveway, sometimes appear to my eyes something like half again as large, and as near, depending on the quality of the light, the absence or presence of clouds and snow cover, and probably other physical factors I can't name and don't understand.

Other alterations are less immediate but equally entrancing.

When the tamaracks turn in late fall their yellowing needles, even from many miles away, paint swathes that didn't exist in spring or summer.

The effect is even more vivid in places such as Steens Mountain with its broad groves of quaking aspens.

But those accoutrements, the snow and the glow and the colorful leaves or needles, are temporary — seasonal shifts akin to a man who cultivates a beard only in winter.

To fully appreciate mountains, it seems to me, requires that you see them from a variety of directions — or at least from the four cardinal points.

The differences can be dramatic.

Take, for instance, Mount Jefferson, Oregon's second-tallest summit at 10,495 feet. This dormant volcano in the central Cascades, when seen from, say, Redmond to the east, hardly seems to be the same peak that I grew up gazing at from my hometown of Stayton, well west of the mountain, near where the Willamette Valley gives way to the Cascade foothills.

From Redmond, Jefferson's ridges and faces converge at the summit in what appears to be a single spire — a classic pyramidal shape.

But from the west, the great gouge that glaciers have cleaved from the mountains' midsection is conspicuous, and Jefferson's summit ridge culminates in two pinnacles which seem, from a great distance, to be about the same height.

Jefferson's more ancient, and heavily eroded, volcanic neighbor to the south of Santiam Pass — Mount Washington, which geologists believe almost surely is dead rather than dormant — boasts an even greater variety of visages.

STARTING OVER

Wyant is working to rebuild Irrigon boys basketball program

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

IRRIGON — Mark Wyant is no stranger to success on the basketball court, but it wasn't an easy road.

He graduated from Emmett High School in Idaho, where the Huskies finished sixth at state his senior year and he was named second-team all-state.

"I got cut as a sophomore," he said. "I played JV my junior year. In college, I was a second-team NAIA All-American in 1991 at Columbia Christian College. That is some of the wisdom I can pass on now. I wasn't a great student. I just got my degree four years ago."

Wyant, who recently was named boys basketball coach at Irrigon High School, can relate to the players who are trying to bounce back after the pandemic and playing for their third coach in three years.

"They just have to put in the work," said Wyant, who also will teach physical education. "There is no confidence. If I can get some of these kids believing, it will go a long way."

Wyant replaces Eric Solis, who stepped in to fill the void after Davie Salas stepped down before last season after failing to follow Oregon's vaccine mandate, that required teachers, staff and coaches to be vaccinated.

The Knights finished 1-9 in Eastern Oregon League play and 2-20 overall last season.

Irrigon will drop down to the 2A Blue Mountain Conference for the 2022-23 season, where the Knights will face Enterprise, Grant Union, Heppner, Stanfield and Weston-McEwen.

"Heppner and Stanfield will be good again this year," Wyant said. "I'm trying to install confidence in the kids. Boyd Davis is a kid I need to have step up. Kids follow what he does. He could be a force."

Wyant, 54, has been working in the aerial application business for years, working in the office, not the plane.

"I do the billing, pretty much everything but fly the plane," he said. "I have been up in the planes, but you have to have a special stomach to do that."

In the winter, Wyant has been assistant basketball coach at Irrigon and Hermiston.

"I haven't done a lot of coaching," he said. "I coached three years of JV ball in Irrigon when my uncle-in-law Abe Burnett was coaching. I coached for a year under Drew Preuninger at Hermiston with Rylie Smith (Stanfield coach). That will be interesting when we play."

Starting with the basics

Wyant has had open gym sessions with his players and a few from the middle school.

"I put some summer stuff together, but a lot of them work," Wyant said. "We are going to be senior heavy. They lack confidence, but they want to compete. I think that was from being locked up the last two years. They worked so hard and when the season came around they didn't get to play. If you put in the work, you can be good at anything. Time, passion and dedication."

Part of the summer program is a shooting drill, that when completed, they can earn a green shirt.

"The younger kids are really taking to it," Wyant said. "They all want to know what they need to do to earn a green shirt."

It's a good start.

Wilson left his mark on the Pilot Rock community

Beloved basketball and softball coach died July 11 at age of 52

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

PILOT ROCK — Butch Wilson was humble, generous, a beloved father and coach, and one of the most respected men in Pilot Rock.

The outpouring of support and memories from the community have been touching since his recent passing, something that he would not have wanted.

"It was all about the kids with him," said former Pilot Rock softball coach Darin Fitzpatrick, who coached with Wilson for the better part of 20 years. "It was a good collaboration of our coaching skills. We always had a lot of fun and taught the girls how to play the game right. He was taken from us way too soon."

Wilson died Monday, July 11, 2022, at his home in Hermiston. He was 52 and was recently diagnosed with cancer, according to his daughter, Taylor Wilson.

There will be a celebration of life for Wilson at 6 p.m. on Saturday, July 16, at the Pilot Rock softball fields. Everyone is welcome.

"Obviously, I think of him as the best person in the world," Taylor said. "He has this way about him, where people want to make him proud. You want to do good by him. That's how he is. You immediately respect him. You look to him for guidance."



Taylor Wilson/Contributed Photo

Butch Wilson, far left, with members of Pilot Rock's 2010 2A state championship softball team. At far right is the late head coach Rick Hoisington. Taylor Wilson is holding the trophy, surrounded by teammates Ashley Gambill (11), Kylee Jensen (2), Amylee Perrine (to right of Jensen) and Liz Holcomb (in glasses). Wilson died Monday, July 11, 2022, at his home

While he was a dedicated coach, Wilson was a journeyman lineman with Pacific Power and was a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 125. He spent more than 30 years with Pacific Power.

He also was an avid outdoorsman, and enjoyed hunting and fishing with his younger brother, Jake. He recently moved to Hermiston to be closer to the river to go fishing.

Wilson grew up in California, and moved to Klamath Falls

his junior year in high school. He played football and participated in track at Henley High School.

"It wasn't like he was a star athlete," Taylor said. "He coached his little brother Jake's Little League baseball team when he was a sophomore in high school. I was 5 when he started coaching my T-ball team."

From there, Wilson coached volleyball, softball and basketball at various levels in Pilot Rock.

When Taylor was in the fourth grade, she and her friends wanted to play volleyball. Wilson got a book and gleaned what he could to help the girls. From there, the youth volleyball program was born.

"Volleyball wasn't his favorite, but he did it for us," Taylor said.

Volleyball turned to basketball and softball, where Wilson was in his comfort zone.

Joan Harrison's daughters Jacki and Ginni played for Wilson, and Harrison kept his basketball book for years.

"I cannot imagine life without him," Harrison said. "He was always there. My youngest (Ginni) was a bashful girl. He took her under his wing and made her a strong, confident woman. He had such a great sense of humor, he loved crazy music and the girls still listen to it. My girls are just devastated."

Jacki Harrison shared her feelings for Wilson in a Facebook post.

"I struggle to believe he is really gone," she wrote. "One of

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