

It's not whether you win or lose

Joseph High School boys varsity coach, team members chip in for one of their own

Story and Photos by Paul Wahl
Wallowa County Chieftain editor

High school sports isn't all about winning for Olan Fuller, head coach of the Joseph Eagles boys basketball team. It's about teaching values and friendship.

Saturday night, Fulfer had the perfect object lesson.

Tucker VanWinkle, a senior at JHS, has been on the basketball team all season but hasn't seen much playing time.

Knowing that his father was gravely ill, and that Tucker had missed several days of school, Fulfer called to check on him. He said he was planning to dress for the game and his family was coming along.

"I think they were looking for a diversion," said Fuller, who joined the JHS staff in 2013 as a physical education and social studies teacher. "I didn't care one way or another, but I wanted him to know we were thinking about him."

Fulfer huddled his team and hatched a plan to show Tucker their support during a tough time. Tucker would start against against Griswold.

"All five of my starters were ready to ride the bench so Tucker could start," said Fuller, who is a graduate of Imbler High School and Eastern Oregon University in La Grande.

The team kept their plan secret until the starting line-ups were announced just prior to the game.

"He was pretty surprised," Fuller said. "I couldn't have cared less whether we won or lost that game, I just wanted to get him some playing time in front of his family."

Fulfer said Tucker is the type of player who gives everything he has to the game.

"He's just a great kid," Fulfer said.

The situation was particularly poignant for Fulfer who lost his mother during his high school years.

Joseph Supt. Lance Homan, who also coaches the varsity girls basketball team, applauded Fulfer's efforts.

"I was aware of what Olan was planning on doing and gave my full support," Homan said. "I am always impressed with staff and coaches that put an emphasis on the bigger picture before athletics."

Joseph schools are tight-knit.

"Living in a small community really allows us to come together as one and support those who are in need," Homan added. "Our thoughts are with the Van-Winkle family. We are all family living in this wonderful community."

The Eagles went on to defeat Griswold, 49-35. Homan's girls' team posted a lopsided 57-31 victory.

Both teams faced off against Pine Eagle on Friday night. The Joseph boys won 64-18 and the girls posted a 57-26 win.

The girls are 5-1 in league play and 11-2 overall, ranked No. 4 in the state in the Division 1A standings.

The boys are 4-2 in league play and 8-4 overall, ranked No. 22 in the Division 1A standings.



Tucker VanWinkle, a senior on the Joseph High School boys basketball team, runs the gauntlet of well-wishers before Saturday night's game against Griswold at the Joseph gym.



At right, Joseph's Tyler Homan bumps up against Griswold's tallest player, Gavin Newton, in Saturday's matchup.

Far right, Alexis Sykora shoots for two during Saturday's game against Griswold.

The boys won 49-35 and the girls won 57-31.

SPORTS CALENDAR

JOSEPH

BOYS BASKETBALL

Jan. 19 — Joseph vs Nixyaawii at Nixyaawii (Pendleton) 7 p.m.

Jan. 20 — Joseph vs Cove at Cove, 5:30 p.m.

Jan. 23 — Joseph vs Wallowa at home, 7:30 p.m.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Jan. 19 — Joseph vs Nixyaawii at Nixyaawii (Pendleton) 5:30 p.m.

Jan. 20 — Joseph vs Cove at Cove, 4 p.m.

Jan. 23 — Joseph vs Wallowa at home, 6 p.m.

WRESTLING

Jan. 20 — Joseph competes in Heppner

WALLOWA

BOYS BASKETBALL

Jan. 19 — Wallowa vs Powder Valley at home, 7:30 p.m.

Jan. 20 — Wallowa vs Nixyaawii at home, 5 p.m.

Jan. 23 — Wallowa vs. Joseph at Joseph, 7:30 p.m.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Jan. 19 — Wallowa vs Powder Valley at home, 5 p.m.

Jan. 20 — Wallowa vs Nixyaawii at home, 3 p.m.

Jan. 23 — Wallowa vs. Joseph at Joseph, 6 p.m.

ENTERPRISE

BOYS BASKETBALL

Jan. 19 — Enterprise vs. Union at home, 7:30 p.m.

Jan. 20 — Enterprise vs. Imbler at Imbler, 5:30 p.m.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Jan. 19 — Enterprise vs. Union at home, 6 p.m.

Jan. 20 — Enterprise vs. Imbler at Imbler, 4 p.m.

WRESTLING

Jan. 19-20 — Enterprise at Clearwater Tournament in Lewiston, TBD

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