



A football camp participant avoids two Tackle Wheels as he sprints forward with the ball. Kids from third grade on up learned football fundamentals at the four-day football camp in Wallowa.

WALLOWA'S KIDS FOOTBALL CAMP TEACHES FOOTBALL BASICS — AND MUCH, MUCH MORE

# COUGAR CAMP

By Ellen Morris Bishop  
Wallowa County Chieftain

**T**he end of summer means the beginning of football. But sandwiched in between, as a sort of joyful interlude, there's Cougar Camp. It's four days of learning that there's fun in football fundamentals for kids from third grade through high school. The cost, \$30 for one child and siblings at half price, is minimal. The proceeds go into the Wallowa Football account and help defray the costs of running a quality football program.

Wallowa High School football coach Matt Brockamp's enthusiastic style of coaching is inspiring to kids of any age. Brockamp, a land surveyor in his life beyond football, has turned the Wallowa High School team around, steering them back towards their once and future dominance. He volunteers his time for the camp, and for coaching the high school team.

The four-day football Cougar Camp, which Brockamp started five years ago, provides aspiring young players with a taste of the skills, strategies, and fun of football, with few of the grievous risks now apparent in the game. There's no tackling, except for tackling oversized orange and black foam donuts called Tackle Wheels. Nothing actually involves grabbing another player. Campers learn the correct approach for a left tackle or a right tackle—with a light touch serving as the only allowed contact. There are no helmets and no pads here, and no need for them. High school players dispense advice, help demonstrate techniques, and toss Tackle Wheels into the paths of young ball carriers, challenging their agility. By helping with the camp, the high school players begin to get their minds back into football mode after a summer of other things.



Coach Brockamp (center) leads football camp participants in a cheer to end the four-day football learning experience.

Photos by Ellen Morris Bishop



**TACKLE PRACTICE** Two youngsters go through a "left tackle drill", where there's no actual tackling, there's just learning how to get into the correct position for a successful tackle.

For Brockamp, Cougar Camp is a way to engage the community. It also helps develop a team bond that transcends grade levels, so that a third-grader will envision himself as a Cougar player right from the get go. The coach is encouraging and demanding all at once. He teaches hustle. He elicits

each player's best effort. His enthusiasm is utterly contagious. As each youngster races after a fellow player with the ball to "tackle" him with a light touch, Brockamp's voice booms across the field.

"Go go, go! Get down there! Eyes right there! Eyes right there! It's a HIT! Get



Tackling the tackle wheel seemed to rank among the most fun thing to do at the four day Wallowa football camp.

there Michael! Get there, Michael! Good job, good job! Here we go! Here we go! Close the distance! Close the distance! Near foot swoop! Left tag for a left shoulder tackle!! Be a great tackler today! Good gather, good tag! Good job!! Nice job!

On the last day of the

camp, there's a review of what everyone learned.

"Fundamentals. We've learned lots of them." Brockamp boomed to his 20 or so campers. "We've talked about defense and special teams. It's been a good four days. You guys did a good job."

"What does it mean to be a Cougar?" he asks. "What

does that C stand for?"

"Courage!" comes twenty young voices in unison.

"And championship character," Brockamp adds. "Doing what you say you are going to do. And being ready to compete."

"The R is important," he says. "We are talking about respect. That means respecting the game and the character of the game. Part of that is having respect for the rules of the game, respect for the officials, having respect for your opponents and helping them up, and having respect for your teammates. That means doing your best for them, being dependable, letting them know you're there for them."

For good measure, Brockamp added an S, the final letter in Cougars. "That's for service," he tells them. "Serving your teammates, your community. Next Saturday at the end of our first week of practice in helmets and full pads, the team is going to go through the town and pull weeds out of flowerbeds, pick up trash, and help move one of our retired teachers in to a new home. And S is for sacrifice. Sacrificing time with your family or playing X-Box so you can be here learning and being here and getting better. And," he continued, "out of service comes leadership, and it starts by setting an example, and it starts with your work ethic. And working as hard or harder than anybody. That's how you lead. You lead from the front."

It's 7:30 p.m., and the sun is setting on the 2019 Cougar Camp. There's no better way to top off four days of football than an ice cream cone. The entire band of Cougars lopes toward the Little Bear Drive In, a staunch supporter of Wallowa football. Brockamp shepherds his charges across the highway and then organizes them into lines. This time, it's not for ball carriers vs. tacklers. It's for vanilla and chocolate. What better way to start the new school year?



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