



Ellen Morris Bishop/For the Wallowa County Chieftain

Wallowa's Sophie Moeller, middle, and her sister Ella Moeller, right, look on as a play is made during the Cougars' match against Powder Valley Friday, April 2, 2021. The sisters — senior Ella and freshman Sophie — are playing their lone season together on the volleyball court during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sisters' lone season together comes during the pandemic

By RONALD BOND
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA — They have been basically inseparable their entire lives.

But because of the age difference between Wallowa High School senior Ella Moeller and her younger sister, freshman Sophie Moeller, the one area the two had not been together was on the volleyball or basketball court.

"This is actually the first year we got to play sports together," said Ella, the setter for the Cougars volleyball team. "Because we're three years apart, in junior high, it's within a two-year span (between sixth and eighth grades), Sophie just missed that. This is the first year we were able to play together."

It was a season the two had looked forward to for years. More than that, their respective classes had looked forward to it.

"We had talked about it because Sophie's class is really athletic, and my class is athletic," Ella said. "We were really looking forward to those classes getting to play together. ... We talked about that this was going to be the year."

Sophie, a right-side hitter for Wallowa, said her class had watched the senior class, and was indeed looking ahead to when they would play with them, instead of being just observers.

"We were all very excited," she said. "Most of my classmates were looking forward to getting to play with the seniors."

Those plans, like everything else the past year, were shaken up severely by the COVID-19 pandemic. And though there was initial disappointment the two had to work through, both have been able to come to a mindset of gratitude — mainly in that although the season looked very different, they at least got to see the court.

"It took me a while to see we are pretty lucky," Ella said.

Having sisters on the same team can, at times, cause drama or in-fighting, but there has been none of that with the Moeller sisters, head volleyball coach Janea Hulse said.

"I haven't had one problem. They do work really well together," she said. You don't see (issues) on the court with those two. Usually they are the ones trying to lift each other up when others can't get through."

The two are often in the middle of getting the team hyped up in practice or in games. Sometimes it's through being goofy. Sometimes it's the two of them leading the encouragement the team needs after a tough rally.

"It's been really fun," the elder Moeller sister said. "Sophie and I have always had a bond where we can joke around with each other and mess with each other. We have a good time. It helps lighten up practice when Sophie and I can get into it and other people get involved. It turns into a big girl fight in a good way — if you know what I mean."

Sophie said, though, that the team — and the two of them — can buckle up and focus when they need to.

"I think our team is very amazing in that way because we can all go from laughing, rolling around on the court, to getting right back into the next play in practice. And I think that is pretty amazing," she said. "Our team has a pretty good bond, I think."

They have contributed a major piece to the team's on-court success



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Wallowa's Sophie Moeller, left, and her sister Ella Moeller, right, look across the net at Powder Valley players during a match Friday, April 2, 2021. The sisters — senior Ella and freshman Sophie — are playing their lone season together on the volleyball court during the COVID-19 pandemic.

this spring, too.

"They are a really fun dynamic," Hulse said. "They're quirky and funny, and at the same time very competitive. They want the best for themselves (and) for the team. It really feeds well within our team."

Hulse knows the girls well, too. Not only has she coached Ella for four years, she has a son in the same freshman class as Sophie. And their mother, Annette Moeller, is the assistant coach. As a result, there is a deeper level of

"I think it was especially hard for me, being a senior and this being my last chance to play high school sports," Ella said. "Everyone right now is looking at everything getting taken away from them and everything we have lost. We do get to play volleyball. It may be limited, but people do get to come watch us. We're getting to do something. We're not shut down completely. We're getting to do all those things. We're just having to follow stricter rules."

"WHEN YOU PLAY A SPORT YOU ALWAYS CREATE BONDS WITH YOUR TEAM ... YOU ALWAYS CREATE A BOND."

— Ella Moeller, Wallowa High School senior

communication that can be read even during a pandemic.

"It's fun, because really between the four of us with Annette, myself and the girls we can look at each other, and even with the masks they can tell" what the look means, Hulse said, whether it's an encouraging or correcting one.

The season has been a highly unusual one for the duo. In the fall, they returned to school somewhat blindsided by the reality that the pandemic hadn't dissipated and they had come in from a summer irrigating job where they were consistently out in a field socially distanced and didn't need masks.

The volleyball season, which was supposed to start in late summer, ended up being highly different as well. There was no post-season to play for, almost no fans in the stands and numerous rule changes.

Even in the spring, while they have had a bit more normalcy and gotten to play teams outside of the region, there still are no state hopes. Fans can come, though there still are limitations.

The younger Moeller sister said she also struggled early with what was taken away, and with the uncertainty.

"I definitely did not have a good mindset. Coming up as a freshman, I was excited to come up and play sports, and wanting my first year of high school to be normal. It took me a while to realize that we are still getting to do something," Sophie said. "When it was looking like we weren't going to get to do something, that was hard."

They have gotten the season in, and have helped Wallowa go 5-5 overall on the volleyball court headed into the finale Friday, April 9, at Elgin.

The sisters have grown even closer during their lone season together, another feat considering how close — inseparable, in fact — they already were.

"When you play a sport you always create bonds with your team ... you always create a bond," Ella said. "It has brought us that much closer. Our team that we are both on is the same one. We get to share that bond not only as sisters, but teammates."



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Enterprise's Savannah Vaughn digs up an Imbler serve during a home match Friday, April 2, 2021.

Volleyball:

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Also last week
Joseph 3, Imbler 2

Joseph outlasted Imbler on the road Tuesday, March 30, in a five-set marathon, 14-25, 25-13, 22-25, 25-15, 15-11, to begin the week.

"They never quit one time, and Imbler played so amazing," Hite said. "It was such a fun game to coach and watch. Both teams were playing their hearts out. They were not letting the ball drop. They were going for everything. It was such a good game."

Stats were not available.
Elgin 3, Enterprise 2

Enterprise had Elgin on the ropes through two sets, but the Huskies turned the table and rallied to earn a home win Wednesday, March 31, 19-25, 15-25, 25-12, 25-15, 15-13.

"Against Elgin, we lost our confidence in the third set, and found it again late in the fifth, but it turned out to be too late," Enterprise head coach Lisa Farwell said.

Jada Gray led the Outlaws' offense with 10 kills. Savannah Vaughn added three blocks and Claire Farwell had 14 digs and served a perfect 21-for-21.

Powder Valley 3, Joseph 0

In their first of two matches Friday, April 2, the Eagles dropped a home match to Powder Valley in three sets, 25-10, 25-16, 25-16.

Sabrina Albee had five kills and four blocks to lead Joseph. Molly Curry added three kills, Aimee Meyers had three kills and three aces, and both Zoey Leith and McKenzie Keffer both had 10 digs.

Damascus Christian 3, Wallowa 0

Wallowa played Damascus Christian close in two of three sets in a home match Friday, April 2, but fell 25-23, 25-15, 25-16.

"First two games were great," Hulse said. "Even going into the second one ... the score doesn't reflect the intensity. I have nothing to complain about from the first two games. They were talking, they were moving, they were moving on from errors, being a cohesive team."

Shanna Rae Tillery had five kills and eight solo blocks for the Cougars. Hulse also commended Haley Brockamp and Sophie and Ella Moeller on their play.

Football:

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to Ryder Goller countered the Badgers' first score of the game earlier in the period, and gave the Cougars a 22-6 lead at the break.

Two touchdowns by Powder Valley in the third, though, got the Badgers back in the game and as close as 22-20. But Ramsden and Hermens hooked up again to help put the game away. The 25-yard touchdown extended the lead back to 10, and gave the Cougars the margin they needed. The Cougars also made some key defensive plays in the fourth, including Bales breaking up a would-be touchdown pass, and later grabbing a game-icing interception.

Ramsden engineered a 13-for-17 day passing, and also was the Cougars' leading rusher with 97 yards on the ground on eight carries. Bales added 53 yards rushing, Hermens had 51 and Zeb Ramsden had 48 in the

Imbler 3, Enterprise 0

Enterprise wrapped up Season 2 with a home loss to Imbler, 25-20, 25-11, 25-23, on Friday, April 2.

Gray had 14 kills to lead the offense, and Asiya Salim had 10 assists. The Outlaws, who finished with a record of 2-6 overall, also served at a 98% clip.

"Against Imbler, we just never really fired up and played our game," Lisa Farwell said. "While these two matches (Elgin and Imbler) were a disappointing way to end our second season, I'm so proud of the team for how they've handled this terrible, weird year so far. They kept good attitudes all the way through both seasons and they worked hard each and every day."

Powder Valley 3, Wallowa 0

Later Friday, Wallowa dropped a three-set bout to Powder Valley, 25-12, 25-14, 25-19.

"You take (on) Powder, and you take every positive that you can out of it," Hulse said of facing the Badgers, state runners-up the last two years. "They should have been No. 1 in the state this year. The girls haven't seen that level of play yet."

Tillery had 11 blocks on defense, and Brockamp recorded five blocks.

Wallowa (5-5 overall) wraps up action Friday, April 9, at Elgin.

Damascus Christian 3, Joseph 0

Joseph matched Damascus Christian later Friday nearly point-for-point for two sets, but ended up falling in a close battle, 25-23, 28-26, 25-17.

"That was a good match, but I think we were starting to feel tired," Hite said of the last set.

Albee had seven kills and two blocks. Leith led the defense with 11 digs, Keffer added nine, and Curry had two blocks.

Joseph splits Saturday matches to wrap busy week

On Saturday, April 3, the Eagles split a pair of road matches, hanging on against Elgin to win in four sets, 26-24, 26-28, 25-19, 25-17, but later Saturday getting swept in Union, 25-19, 25-14, 25-18.

Stats were not available for either match.

Joseph (7-4 overall) is scheduled to finish the season Friday at a tournament in North Powder.

Cougars' 248-yard ground performance.

Hermens was the leading receiver with 66 yards on three catches, and also had six solo tackles and six tackle assists. Goller had 33 yards receiving and Bales added 31.

Wallowa outgained the Badgers 407-259, and limited Powder Valley to just 51 yards passing.

The Cougars (3-1 overall) wrap up the season Friday, April 9, at Elgin.

Also
South Wasco County 45, Joseph 0

The Eagles (4-1 overall) suffered their worst loss in the three years of playing six-man football as nemesis South Wasco County thumped Joseph Friday, April 2, 45-0.

Stats were not available.

Enterprise's game canceled

Enterprise's contest at Elgin Friday, April 2, was canceled.

The Outlaws (1-1 overall) wrap up their season Friday, April 9, at Cove.