

NORTHEASTERN OREGON

Shortage of volleyball officials a major issue

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Jennifer Stephens, a volleyball official for the past 30 years, remembers a time when the Union, Wallowa and Baker county region was flush with high school volleyball officials.

The La Grande resident said it was sometimes hard for less-experienced officials to get the match assignments they wanted because the region had almost a surplus of referees. The days when the Northeast Oregon Volleyball Association, which provides officials for high school matches in Union, Wallowa and Baker counties, had plenty of referees are a distant memory.

The association is down to 16 officials this season, up two from a year ago but still well short of the optimum 20 to 24 officials needed, said Karen Howton, of Island City.

This means local volleyball officials will be stretched thin again this year, keeping the pressure on officials.

“Last season, I was officiating five or six days a week. By the end of the season, I was dead tired. It is grueling. It is easy to get burned out,” Howton said.

Stephens agrees the shortage puts great pressure on officials.

“We are on the run from the start of the season until the last playoff game,” she said. “I don’t get to see much of my family during that time.”

Heidi Justus, commissioner of the Northeast Oregon Volleyball Association, credits athletic directors with being very accommodating.

“The athletic directors are really great to work with,” she said.

Justus said the shortage of officials is partially due to the COVID-19 pan-



Isabella Crowley/The Observer

Angie Malone, of La Grande, makes a call Saturday, Aug. 27, 2022, at the Hanna Cashell Memorial Tournament at La Grande High School. Malone is among the volleyball officials who belong to the Northeast Oregon Volleyball Association, which serves schools in Union, Wallowa and Baker counties.

demic. She said that prior to the pandemic, the Northeast Oregon Volleyball Association had 16 to 18 officials. Some who stopped officiating during the pandemic have not returned, she said.

Stephens believes one of the best ways to address the shortage is to encourage younger members of the

association to recruit their friends, such as those they play intramural volleyball with.

When encouraging people to step forward, Stephens believes it is important to concentrate on the contributions people will make as officials — without them, she said, girls will not

MORE INFORMATION

The Northeast Oregon Volleyball Association provides training for everyone who wants to become an official. It is now signing up people for training prior to the 2023 season. People who are interested in serving as officials for the Northeast Oregon Volleyball Association should send an email to Heidi Justus at neovba@gmail.com.

it means to the girls playing, student-athletes she gets to see grow up right before her eyes, while officiating not only high school but also middle school matches.

“I love every one of them,” she said.

The camaraderie officials share is also cherished by Howton.

“You have fun traveling together. You get to know each other well. Some of my dearest friends are volleyball officials,” she said.

Volleyball officials are paid about \$67 for matches involving schools in the Class 4A to 6A enrollment classifications and about \$64 for games of schools in the smaller 3A and below classifications. It’s not a lot, but Stephens said it is a sum people like college students would welcome.

“What student could not use a few extra dollars in their pocket?” she said.

Destiny Wecks vying to become next Ms. Stars and Stripes

By **ANN BLOOM**
For the Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Destiny Wecks is reaching for the stars — and the stripes too.

The 18-year-old from Enterprise is currently in fifth place with a few weeks left to find out if she will become the next Ms. Stars and Stripes and take home \$25,000. The winner will also be featured in a two-page article in Star Magazine. The competition comes with the opportunity to participate in a variety of coun-

VOTING ONLINE

Voting is free and done online. Votes can be placed once every 24 hours at www.msstripes.org/2022/destiny-wecks.

ty-style events around the United States.

Contestants advance in standing by levels, based on the number of online votes they get. The most recent round of voting ended Aug. 25 for her group. Groups are randomly selected. The

number of votes a contestant receives determines whether they advance in the standings. Wecks said as long as she remains in the top 10 she will advance. Once voting ends for a group, and a contestant advances, the voting begins again. If she wins, her title will be Ms. Stars and Stripes 2022.

The contest was advertised in Cowgirl Magazine and on social media. Wecks said she saw it on social media and applied online, sometime around the Fourth of July weekend. She was not sure how many con-

testants there are, but since it is a national competition, there could be “at least 5,000. There were a lot,” she said.

Wecks is not new to competition. She is currently Miss Teen Rodeo Oregon and aspires to one day be Miss Rodeo America. She has been Junior Miss Rodeo Oregon, Honorary Chief Joseph Queen for 2020 and 2021 and a Miss Oregon High School Rodeo First Attendant.

Wecks has a profile page on the competition’s website. Under her motto section, she states that she

always wants to be seen “as a person who works hard to make a difference on a large or small scale. And this difference can change people’s lives, which I hope will leave a legacy. I want to be remembered as the girl who wants change for the better.”

If she wins, Wecks said she will use the money to further her education and, again quoting from her profile page, “growing up in a very small community who has always been there for me as my support, I would like to find a way to give back to them. Where my end goal

would be to have it help all people involved in my successes and life.”

She will be a first-year student in the fall at Treasure Valley Community College, taking classes in the area of agriculture business management, but looking at something more specific later on “in the ag world and career area,” she said.

Asked if there were anything she would like people to know about her experience, Wecks said it would be that she is grateful for all the support “and love the community has shown for me.”



LIVE DEMO EVENT



This is an event you don't want to miss!

Profiles, movemnet joints, using quadec, and jolly to wrap a niche for this live event We hope to see you there!

Carpet One Floor and Home
800 S River St, Enterprise OR 97828

Wednesday, September 7th

5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Dinner will be provided.

For more information, please contact:

Jared Bedard - 541-426-9228 or jared@carpetoneo.com



One of 101 Best Western Events American Cowboy Magazine

IT'S OUR 41st Again!

HELLS CANYON MULE DAYS

Wallowa County Fairgrounds
Enterprise, Oregon

Rated "E" for Everyone!

Mule Show with Events & Games for All Ages
Non Motorized Parage • Pit B-B-Q
Mule Clinics * D.O. Cook-Off
Cowboy Poetry Gathering • PT Mule Sale
Cowboy Church with Soul Renovation
Western Art & Gear Show
Features Tennessee Mule Artist Bonnie Shields

• **SATURDAY NIGHT CONCERT -**
KRISTYN HARRIS DUO - OK THEATER - 7:00 PM •
TY EVANS MULEMANSHIP CLINIC - SEPT. 6-7-8 FMI: TSMULES.COM

SHOW INFO: SONDRALOZIER
541-426-3271 • 541-263-0104
WWW.HELLSCANYONMULEDAYS.COM
EXPERIENCE A GREAT TIME IN N.E. ORGEON

