



SPORTS

Junction City by inches

Lions' season ends in overtime heartbreaker

BY MATT HOLLANDER

The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Much like the unseasonably warm weather, March Madness also came early this year. Cottage Grove and Junction City delivered a dramatic finish to their play-in game for the state playoffs on Saturday. The Tigers prevailed 41-39 in overtime, but not before a miraculous series of events in the closing moments left both teams on the brink.

Trailing by two with 14 seconds to play, Cottage Grove inbounded from its

own baseline and pushed the ball past midcourt, only to have it stolen away by Junction City. But Taylor Sayles somehow forced a Tiger turnover, dribbled the ball to just outside of the 3-point line and launched a would-be game winner that rattled off the rim at the buzzer.

"We had a play to get something going, but it didn't happen the way we drew it up," said the Cottage Grove senior. "I've never dreamed of taking a last-second shot like that, and it's not something you can practice for. I just heard everyone screaming for me to

shoot."

The final sequence capped a gripping back-and-forth in which both teams had opportunities to win. Junction City held a seven-point edge with five minutes left in the fourth quarter but did not score again in regulation. And the Lions had multiple leads of three points or more in the extra period.

In the end, however, season-long themes of turnovers and impatience bit the Lions when they could least afford it. Katarina Thompson took a steal in for a layup to give the Tigers a 40-39

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photo by Matt Hollander

With time running out, Taylor Sayles gave the Lions one last shot at victory.

Wrestlers finish strong at state, set the stage for 2016

Lions finish 12th, have three individual placers

BY MATT HOLLANDER

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Cottage Grove came within two spots of its goal to finish in the top 10 at this past weekend's state wrestling tournament, held at the Veteran's Memorial Coliseum in Portland. However, with five of their six qualifiers expected to return, the Lions are poised to accomplish even more next year.

"There were a few things that could have gone our way and didn't, but overall I think we won more matches that we weren't suppose to," said Cottage Grove coach Kyle Temple, who had to make a brief detour back to Albany for the birth of his child after initially arriving with the team on Thursday.

Crook County ran away with the team title by outdistancing second-place Henley, 327-165.5. It was, however, a very competitive race for teams vying for the top 10, as just 23 points separated places nine through 14.

"We knew that it would be hard to finish in the top 10, but I feel that we reached our potential this season," said junior Bryce Allen, who was Cottage Grove's only returning member from last year's state team that placed 22nd. "We'd like to see more qualify for state next year, and that's certainly possible with how many on our team finished fifth (just outside of qualifying) at regionals."

After looking at his 120-pound bracket, Allen was not optimistic about his chances to place — especially after losing his opening match. But he got a surge in confidence when he avenged a loss from earlier in the year to North Valley's Ricky Esparza in the consolation bracket.

"Once I beat him, I was determined to place," said Allen, who rode that momentum to finish on the podium in sixth.

Andrew Bordeaux placed fourth at 160 pounds and was Cottage Grove's



photo by Jo Wheat/ J Wheat Photogrpahy

Cottage Grove's Bryce Allen (top) beat Sweet Home's Anthony Hardee 6-3 en route to a sixth place finish at the OSAA 4A Wrestling Tournament on Saturday. Crook County won the team title with 327 points; Cottage Grove was 12th with 45 points.

highest finisher. Bordeaux, who was seeded third, breezed through his first two opponents before facing two state champions in the semifinals and consolation final.

"I could have been more defensive in my last two matches but I was still happy about finishing fourth," said Bordeaux.

With the top three in his weight class set to graduate, Bordeaux hopes to go undefeated and win the state championship next year.

"This tournament taught me that I can stick with kids at the highest level," he said. "I'm just as good as them. I just have to bring the right mindset."

Andrew's twin brother, Alan, placed sixth at 152 pounds. Cottage Grove's other qualifiers included Tanner Herbert at 195 pounds, Shawn Farrell at 220 pounds and Adam Lamb at 285 pounds.

Wrestling in the girls' tournament, Katie Dennis and Mae Locke placed second and third, respectively.

The clock was both friend and foe of Dennis during the tournament. In her semifinal match, she pinned Sisters' Cheyenne Sproat with one second left in the third period but was pinned by Hood River Valley's Payton Rigert with one second left in the first period.

"When you're winning it's kind of a blur," said Dennis. "But you're definitely aware of the clock when you're fighting off your back and everyone is shouting 'short time.'"

While many Lions brought significant wrestling experience to the team, there was a lot of novelty for the team this season: the Bordeaux's competed at Churchill last year; Lamb is a freshman; and it was coach Kyle Temple's first season leading the program.

Temple is optimistic about this

group's potential to move up at state next year, but he knows that some of the senior-laden programs that were ahead of Cottage Grove this year will merely reload with young talent.

"The priority for right now," he said, "is to have a solid off-season. If we commit to Olympic-style wrestling, we can get in 50 to 75 more matches, and we won't be shell-shocked when we go up against year-round programs."



Athlete of the Week

Andrew Bordeaux

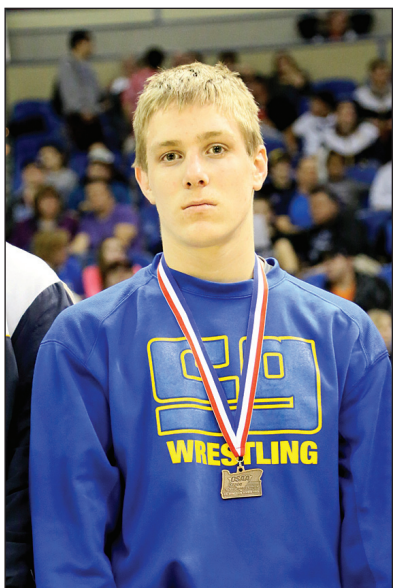


photo by Jo Wheat / J Wheat Photography

When one door closed, another one opened for Murray

Michael Murray stepped out of his comfort zone for his first varsity coaching assignment, this year with Cottage Grove

BY MATT HOLLANDER

The Cottage Grove Sentinel

When Cottage Grove Athletic Director Dave Presley approached Michael Murray this past fall about a potential role in the girls' basketball program, Murray — who was then considering returning to Marist for a second season as its J.V. boys' coach — welcomed the challenge of his first varsity assistant job. He was less sure, however, about coaching girls for the first time ever.

"I knew there were high hopes for the program and they had a great player in Conner Borigo, but that was about it," Murray recalled. "I've always considered myself more suited for the boys, but ultimately I had to decide if it was more important for me to coach at the highest level."

Murray did not need to be persuaded to take the job, but he said that several conversations with coach Kerry Clawson helped him overcome any reservations.

"I don't know how girls think, but basketball is basketball no matter how you teach it. Girls learn it the same way as the boys. The physicality is the only difference," he said.

It was the first time in many years that the program was able to hire a full-time varsity assistant,

and Clawson said that Murray's ability to demonstrate skills on the court was invaluable and he was an excellent role model.

Murray, 24, has already been coaching for six years and seems destined to be a varsity head coach — should he choose to pursue that path. However, had his original plans worked out, Murray would probably be a lot further away from earning his own bench.

After a standout career at Marist High School, which included a state championship his senior year, Murray was invited to walk on at Southern Oregon. But he struggled to match the physicality of bigger, more experienced players. And after a conversation with his coach, he decided to leave the program.

But unlike the many college athletes who have made similar choices, Murray stuck with his sport. He stayed active through intramural basketball, lifted weights twice a day and played on the school's rugby team.

He also started coaching. With help from his former high-school coach, Chris Schmerbach, Murray took on the eighth-grade boys program at Sacred Heart Middle School in Ashland, and also helped in the local YMCA leagues. The



photo by Matt Hollander

Cottage Grove assistant coach Michael Murray brought a lot of experience to his first varsity assistant job, but coaching girls was all new territory.

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