

Lions leave no doubt at Pleasant Hill

Ward, defense key Cottage Grove's win over Billies

BY MATT HOLLANDER
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Many Lions would credit a dramatic come-from-behind victory over Pleasant Hill as the launch point of their run to the 2014 state playoffs.

Should Cottage Grove advance to the postseason this year, though, last week's victory over the Billies will serve as little more than a footnote.

After opening its season with an 8-6 win over Cascade — a 2014 playoff team — on March 16, Cottage Grove defeated Pleasant Hill 8-1 on Wednesday.

Tristan Mihan went 2-for-4 and scored two runs, and Bryce Allen went 2-for-2 with an RBI to lead the Lions in their victory over the Billies. Lucas

Ward gave up just three hits in four and one-third shutout innings for Cottage Grove (2-0).

Mitchell Williamson was 3-for-3 and Dakota Jubie went 2-for-3 with a double for Pleasant Hill (0-2).

Through four innings, the Lions led 2-0 but had left six runners on base. Over the final three innings that ratio would improve to six runs to four stranded runners.

"We played pretty well," said Cottage Grove coach Dan Geiszler. "There are some spots we need to improve on. Our base-running was a little suspect at times, and it's those little things that could cost you in a big game."

As the Lions stole nine bases, Geiszler clarified that his comments related to tagging up.

"We talk about being aggressive on the bases, and we don't worry about getting picked off. We definitely had that mentality today," he said.

While Cottage Grove struggled in the early goings to convert on scoring opportunities, Ward and the defense kept Pleasant Hill off of the scoreboard until the fifth inning.

"We've come a long way so far," Ward said. "Everybody is committed to the same goal, and that showed on the field today in our communication and knowing where to go with the ball to make plays."

In his four-plus innings, Ward was able to keep a low pitch count, and Geiszler said this was one of the keys of the game.

"I still had a lot of energy going into the fifth, and that allowed me to have a good outing," Ward said.

Offensively, Geiszler said he was

thrilled with the team's bunting, pointing to Cottage Grove scoring three runs in the seventh inning that came off of bunts.

"We've played two good teams so far, no doubt about that," he said. "I like the way our guys play; they play hard, and with an attitude of 'come and get us because we're coming to get you.'"

The Lions played in the Salem-Keizer Tornado Tournament the following weekend.

"I expect us to keep getting better," Geiszler said. "We play a couple teams that are very beatable, and if we do what we need to do we'll be fine."

That would turn out to be an understatement.

On Saturday, Cottage Grove defeated Scio and Jefferson by scores of 19-3 and 31-0, respectively. The Lions capped the tournament with a 9-2 win over Salem Academy on Sunday.



Athlete of the Week



Lucas Ward

Golf teams find opening fairways

BY MATT HOLLANDER
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

The start to Cottage Grove's boys' golf season was a "mixed bag," according to coach Kent Russo.

The Lions opened at Bandon Dunes Golf Resort, which is widely considered one of the premiere golf settings in the U.S. They played a practice round on March 15 on Bandon Trails, and a match on March 16 on the Pacific Dunes course. Cottage Grove placed sixth out of eight teams, and its score of 407 was the highest ever for this year's seniors.

"The memories will last a lifetime, but the golf was forgettable," Russo said. "Fortunately, it was a non-league event. And in their defense, it was the first tournament of the season and the course is extremely difficult."

The Lions performed much better in their first league match, March 18 at Tokatee Golf Club. Cottage Grove placed fourth out of 12 teams, and second among fellow Special District 2 schools.

Led by seniors Johnny Conrad (82) and Cameron Sandoval (84), the Lions shot 371 — just 12 strokes back from league-leader Stayton.

"The play of our seniors will be the foundation of our season," Russo said. "When Derek Carlton (96) gets a few items ironed out he'll be shooting in the 80s as well."

Russo said that Cottage Grove's ability to contend for a third straight league title will depend on the return of Nick Russo from a preseason wrist injury. He added that there is a three-way battle for the team's remaining varsity spots: Junior Dylan Wooten was the team's fourth scorer at Tokatee; sophomores Jessy Thomason and Jeremy Hall are in the mix as well.

Cottage Grove returns to action on Tuesday at Santiam.

The girls' golf season began last Wednesday with a 9-hole round at Creekside Golf Club in Salem. Carly Sand shot a 68 to lead the Lions. Cottage Grove shot 300 collectively and placed fourth out of five teams.

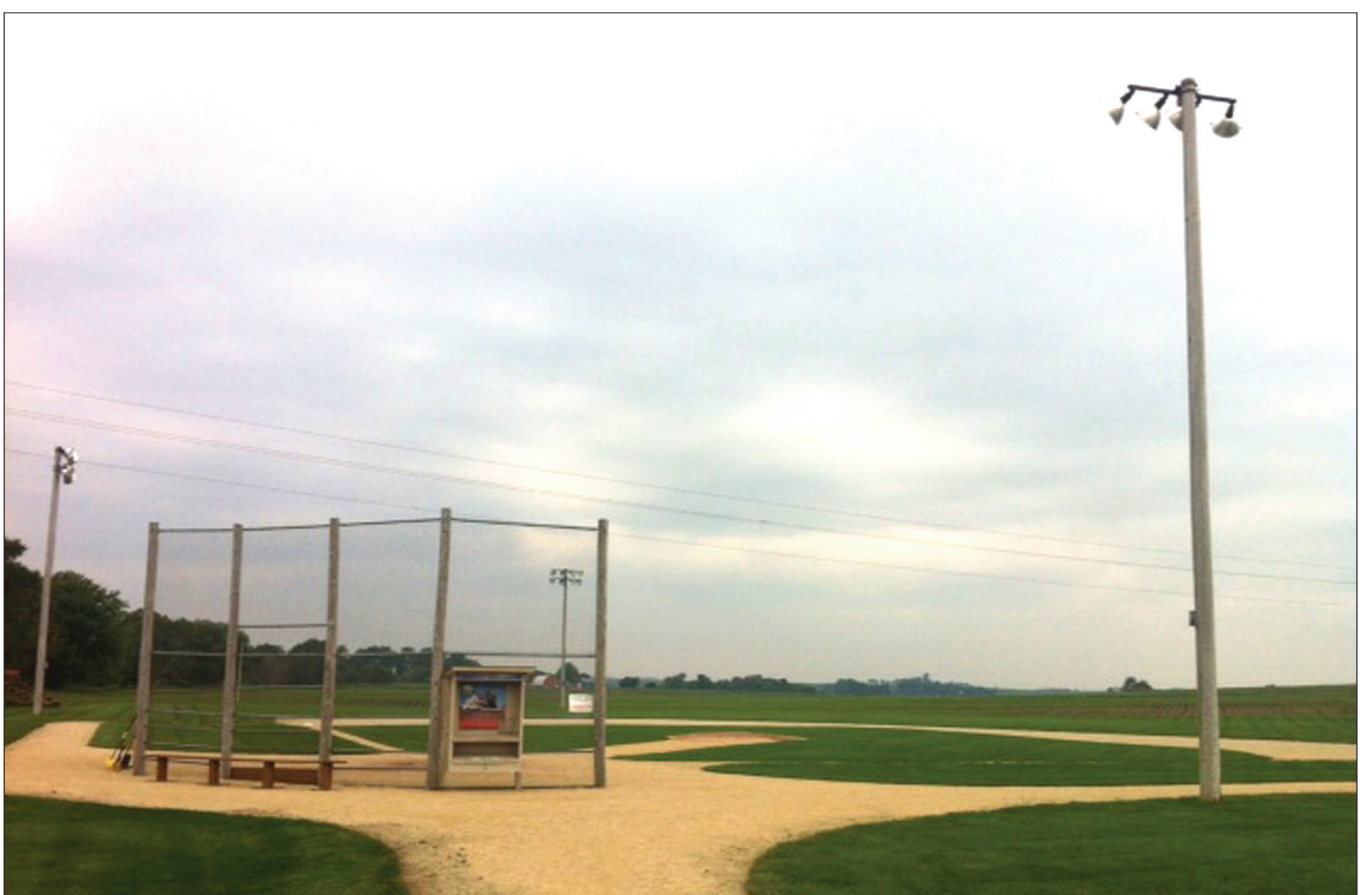


photo by Matt Hollander

Is this heaven? No, it's Iowa: During a summer 2013 road trip through the midwest, Matt veered off course to visit the Field of Dreams.

Spring Awakening: The Sentinel editors work through their mutual, yet differing, love of America's pastime

BY MATT HOLLANDER AND JON STINNETT
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Matt Hollander: Jon, spring is my favorite time of year to be a living, breathing human being. My zest booms with the longer days, sights of cherry blossoms and smell of freshly laid bark mulch. These vernal cues also announce a turning of the sports-calendar page. You might assume that — given my background — I'm about to expound on the virtues of running, jumping and throwing. However, for reasons I can't reconcile, I find baseball equally synonymous with everything I love about this season.

I've never played and couldn't tell you the last game I watched on TV, but the only team caps I

wear are the Cubs and Red Sox, and any list of my favorite sports movies includes For the Love of the Game, Bull Durham, Field of Dreams and The Sandlot.

I'm clearly ignorant of traditional AL/NL allegiances, and I probably have a man-crush on Kevin Costner, but is there an explanation for my inconsistency?

Jon Stinnett: Forgive me for not recognizing the inconsistency, as I'd wager that you and I are among the millions who consider the start of baseball season a quintessential sign of spring, even among those with track and field coursing through their veins.

Each year, the arrival of pitchers and catchers at Spring Training tells me that the long, dull days of

winter have officially passed, that the pendulum of life's great annual motion is again on the upswing. I'm curious to know, though, how you came to love a game you've never played in a place that doesn't have a major-league team nearby?

With regard to your MLB allegiances: Absent a geographical affinity for either the Cubs or Red Sox, I'd have to wager that either a) you've admired the big leagues from afar (and, like many current Cubs fans, saw them more frequently on cable than other teams) or b) you're the type of sports fan who relishes the opportunity to root for a (at least until recently, in Boston's case) perennial underdog. I should already know the answer, but how's my guess?

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Athletes sizzle at Cottage Grove Icebreaker

BY MATT HOLLANDER
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Last Wednesday's Icebreaker meet wasn't supposed to be much more than a tune-up for the hundreds of athletes representing Cottage Grove, Crescent Valley, Marist and Thurston. But perfect weather conditions paved the way for 83 personal bests by the Lions, and three state-leading marks.

On the boys' side, Tucker Porter and Michael Tharpe paced the Lions with wins in the triple jump (39') and 110 hurdles (16.61), respectively.

Brad Geisler, who placed second in the discus (126' 11"), and Jayden Tucker, who placed second in the long jump (18' 10.75"), also had strong season-debuts for Cottage Grove, which finished fourth with 34 points.

Defending state champion Marist won the meet with 94 points.

Spartans Dustin Jones and Crescent Valley's Justice Lamer turned in 5A state-leading times in the 400 (50.62) and 3000 (9:07.18), respectively.

Celeste Pelham took first in the 100 hurdles (18:34) for Cottage Grove's only win in the girls' competition. However, several Lions finished second in their respective events, including Chelsey Bot-

torff (400 — 1:04.71), Melissa Powers (javelin — 89' 7"), Melissa Thielman (high jump — 4' 8") and Courtney Hammel, who threw 94' 9" in the discus — just three inches off of first place.

Cottage Grove finished fourth with 39 points. Marist won the meet with 86 points.

With her time of 10:38.78, the Spartans' Olivia Powell established the state's best mark in the 3000.

Cottage Grove coach Ricky Knutson said the first meet of the year always feels like Christmas; he never knows what he's going to get. While this year's opener did not bring many surprises, he was excited to see that many athletes were ahead of where he expected them to be.

"There were definitely some nerves out there, but as coaches we really tried to play down the first meet," Knutson said. "The kids can be pretty hard on themselves but we want them to understand it's not always a seamless transition from where they left off the previous season."

The Lions will return to competition with a league meet at Junction City on April 2.

Knutson said that the team will work on building fitness and overall athleticism during the interim spring-break week.



photo by Matt Hollander

Tucker Porter runs the 4x400 relay for Cottage Grove.

Softball sweeps opening week

The Cottage Grove softball team opened its season with a 12-8 win over Stayton last Wednesday. The Lions scored six runs in the first inning and five more in the sixth while applying constant defensive pressure on the Eagles. Taylor Sayles pitched three strikeouts and allowed seven hits. Offensively, Amanda Anderson hit 2-for-3 and Katie Lyons went 2-for-4.

The Lions maintained their hot start with a 10-0 victory over Siuslaw on Saturday. Cottage Grove scored seven runs in the third inning and three more in the fourth before closing out the game in five innings.

Sayles threw two strikeouts and allowed just four hits in the shutout. She also went 2-for-4 at the plate, and Anderson was 2-of-3. Kalea Galbreath made several key defensive plays at second base.

The Lions were originally scheduled to compete in a tournament at North Marion this past Monday and Tuesday, however it was cancelled. Coach Cheryl Frieze said she was looking forward to competing against some quality opponents and was disappointed that the tournament was called off.

Cottage Grove hosts Reedsport at 2 p.m. today and travels to the coast on Saturday for a double header against Marshfield and North Bend.