

Cottage Grove boys' soccer faces its challenges

By Zach Silva
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The Cottage Grove boys' soccer team is having their most successful season since the 2009 team that went to the state semifinals. But while the Lions are flying high through the Sky-Em League and are currently 6-0-1, the biggest obstacle that they face is the lack of competition in league play.

"We're a lot weaker than we have been in the past," said head coach Vern Stewart. "Sky-Em league has been tough in the past. Last year we finished in the fourth position and made it to the playoffs because of how strong the league was, how strong Sky-Em was. It's not as strong this time."

After having played every team in the league once, the Lions are currently undefeated in league play. Additionally, they are the only team in the league that is above .500 in the overall standings. The OSAA rankings currently have the Lions at 6th in the state while the rest of Sky-Em is 17th, 20th, 32nd, 36th and 39th respectively out of the 40 teams in 4A soccer.

In league play, they have outscored their opponents this season 31-5 for a positive goal differential of +26 on the season. The combined average goal differential for the five other teams in Sky-Em is a stunning -16.8.

While the Lions have a real chance to go unde-

feated in league, it is hard to tell what that will reveal about how good this team is on the state level. The other difficulty is that due to forest fires at the beginning of the season, the Cottage Grove non-league schedule was cut short because of poor air quality. They were unable to play in their preseason jamboree and their non-league games between Creswell and Phoenix. Notably, Phoenix is ranked fifth in 4A, just one spot ahead of Cottage Grove.

The one game that they did play in was against Philomath that resulted in a 0-0 tie. But Stewart believes that his team is different today than it was when they played that game.

"If that game happened today there is no doubt in my mind that we would have put the ball in the back of the net," he said.

To adequately prepare for playoffs, Stewart is planning to play in some tune-up games between the end of the regular season and the start of the postseason. Because of the games that were cancelled, the Lions are allowed to schedule games to prepare.

"I'm going to try and get someone strong in preparation for that," said Stewart. "Someone hopefully out of our league that hasn't played enough games and that can play a game."



PHOTOS BY SAVANNAH DAVIS

The Cottage Grove boys' soccer team is in the middle of its most winning season in eight years but head coach Vern Stewart says the Sky-Em League is still a hurdle. The team is currently 6-0-1 in the league and says the biggest obstacle is a lack of competition.



PHOTOS BY SAVANNAH DAVIS

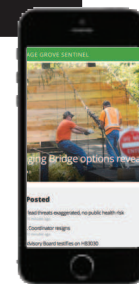
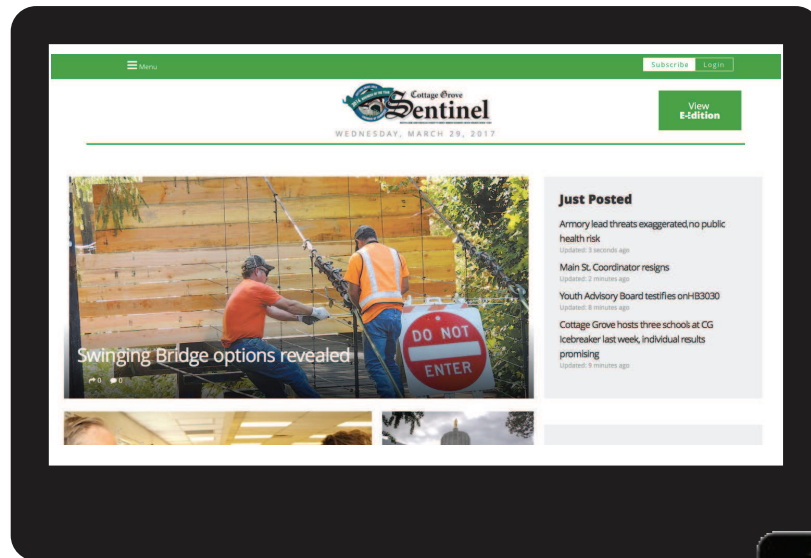
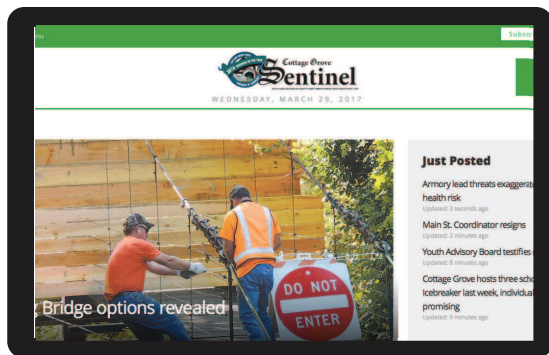
Top right Kyle Conley, bottom left Lathan Vanwagner, bottom right Konrad Raum take on Sutherlin on September 21. Lions won the game 9-0.



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