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# We're trying this again

*A year removed from the state tournament that wasn't, the Lions' girls basketball team looks to earn another shot*

BY JON STINNETT  
COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

At first, it must have seemed like some kind of sick joke.

Even now, the memory of that day brings Erin Royse to tears. As an assistant coach with Cottage Grove's 2019-20 girls' basketball team, Royse and the Lions found themselves

aboard a bus bound for the state tournament following an electrifying season.

"We were the first game against Philomath," she recalls. "Steve (Eastburn, the Lions' head coach last season) was at the head coaches' meeting, and he called us on the bus and said, 'We need to let the players know that it's been canceled, and we have to call parents, because some of them are probably on their way up.'"

The growing threat of the coronavirus pandemic, and of hosting large events that could become "super-spreaders" of the virus, had prompted the cancelation of the state tournament and just about every other major event in the country all at once. Of course, the Lions — whose bus Royse says was only about a mile away from the tournament when the fate-

ful call came -- were devastated.

Countless tears were shed, and the knowledge that just about every other basketball player in the nation was going through something similar was but mild comfort. In some ways, Royse believes, that feeling left a lasting mark on all involved.

"I think everybody walked away from there with a little of their heart smashed, broken, after working so hard," she said.

Last week, the Lions finally returned to the court, this time with Royse at the helm following the resignation of Eastburn. They're hoping for another tournament trek, though with a better outcome than last spring. And though they'll be playing to win, Royse says they'll also be focusing on fun with the memory of a lost opportunity still so easy to call to mind.

Of course, in an abbreviated six-week season starting in late-spring, mere days removed from the end of softball and track season and with plenty of modifications meant to minimize Covid risk, the 2021 campaign is bound to bring surprises.

"We're ironing out the wrinkles, and we're playing to have fun," Royse said. "This is just a very different year."



see GIRLS on B3 Draped in Creswell defenders, Teanna Child fights toward the rim.

## Lions battle back, but bulldogs prove too feisty

*Boys' 2021 campaign begins at home vs. Creswell*

BY JON STINNETT  
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Lion fans arriving late to Thursday's meet-up between the Cottage Grove and Creswell boys basketball teams could have been forgiven for thinking they were already looking at a lost cause.

Indeed, the Bulldogs jumped on the Lions from the opening tipoff, and before long, Creswell had opened up a yawning 15-3 lead. But if Cottage Grove had doubts about its ability to keep the game interesting, they didn't let them show.

The Bulldogs kept pouring it on, and they led 29-10 not far into the second quarter. The Lions needed a spark to keep things from getting downright ridicu-

lous. That's when Jayden Cameron caught fire.

During an inspired 12-0 run, Cameron drained buckets from all angles, and his team responded right along with him. By halftime, the 5-11 junior had led Cottage Grove nearly all the way back, to a deficit of just 34-30.

"He really stepped forward for us offensively," said Lions Head Coach Seth Hutchison. "We had a couple guys out, and he took a leadership role, a role that's going to be his all year long."

The Lions came out a bit sluggish to start the second half, however; Creswell drained five unanswered points to start the half, and a few untimely turnovers gave Creswell extra chances

that they capitalized on again and again. Still, Cottage Grove battled.

Trailing by eight to start the fourth quarter, the Lions cut the lead to six before the Bulldogs again pulled ahead to a lead they'd never relinquish. Creswell went on to win, 59-53.

Though a loss, Hutchison described the game as "useful."

"We learned a lot about ourselves," he said. "We've got a lot of work ahead of us, but I think we're about where we should be at this time of year. We should always be improving, and I thought we battled really hard."

On Saturday, the Lions traveled to Springfield and



see BOYS on B4 Carter Bascue jumps for a two-points shot.

## Athlete of the Week

*This week's athlete of the week is Jayden Cameron*

Jayden Cameron scores two during a 12-0 run that brought the Lions back from a gaping deficit against Creswell. Coach Seth Hutchison says he expects Cameron to play a significant leadership role all season for Cottage Grove.



Jayden Cameron scores two impactful points during a flurry of scoring that ignited the Lions in the second half.

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