

WESTERN OREGON ROUNDUP

# Wolves headed to regional tourney

Men's basketball earns at-large bid to West Region, faces Azusa Pacific

**Itemizer-Observer staff report**

**BILLINGS, Mont.** — For the first time in program history, Western Oregon's men's basketball team is headed to the national tournament.

The Wolves received an at-large berth into the NCAA Division II National Tournament on Sunday night.

"We are thrilled to be selected and to represent our conference and our university in the NCAA tournament," WOU coach Brady Bergeson said.

Western Oregon (23-6 overall, 15-3 Great Northwest Athletic Conference), which won the GNAC regular season title, received the eighth seed in the West Regional.

The Wolves will take on top-seeded and tournament host Azusa Pacific Friday at

**March Madness**

**What:** NCAA Division II National Basketball Tournament, West Region.

**When:** Friday, 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, 5 p.m.; Monday, 7 p.m.

**Where:** Azusa Pacific University, Calif.

**What's at stake:** Western Oregon's men's basketball team competes in the first round of the west region. The region winner advances to the national quarterfinals March 25 in Evansville, Ind. Follow the *Itemizer-Observer* on Facebook and Twitter for updates.

7:30 p.m.

The Cougars defeated WOU 81-74 on Nov. 21 in the teams' lone meeting of the

season. Azusa Pacific enters the regional with a 24-5 record.

"Azusa Pacific is loaded with firepower," Bergeson said. "They can shoot it from all positions. They are deep, fast, and well coached. It is exactly the type of challenge we would want at this point in the year."

GNAC tournament champion Seattle Pacific earned the seventh seed and will take on BYU-Hawaii. California Baptist, Dixie State, Cal Poly Pomona and Chico State round out the remaining teams.

Quarterfinal winners advance to the semifinals on Saturday, with the championship matchup on Monday night.

The winners of the regional advance to the na-

tional Division II quarterfinals March 25 in Evansville, Ind.

The Wolves received an at-large berth to regionals despite being upset in the semifinals of the GNAC men's basketball tournament.

Western Washington defeated Western Oregon 88-79 on Friday in Billings, Mont., despite 29 points from junior Andy Avgi.

Julian Nichols, Devon Alexander and Jordan Wiley also reached double digits in scoring with 15, 14 and 13 points, respectively.

The Vikings lost to Seattle Pacific 81-68 in the conference title game on Saturday night.

**BASEBALL WINS THREE:** Facing the Great Northwest Athletic Conference preseason



Pratt

favorite, Western Oregon's baseball team took three of four games from Central Washington. The Wolves lost the first game of the series 4-1 before winning 7-3 in Saturday's nightcap. Central High graduate Jesse Pratt threw a complete game during the win, throwing seven strikeouts. WOU swept the Wildcats 17-6 and 5-3 on Sunday. Senior Matt Taylor recorded eight hits during the series, while Garrett Harpole recorded seven hits and eight RBIs. Western Oregon (10-14 overall, 6-2 GNAC) hosts Montana State Billings for a pair of doubleheaders on Friday and Saturday. First pitch is scheduled for 1 p.m. Friday

**TRACK AND FIELD SWEEPS AT WILLAMETTE:**

Western Oregon's men's and women's track and field teams won the 2015 Willamette Opener on Saturday in Salem. Throwers Justin Larson, Amanda Short and Emmi Collier recorded NCAA Division II provisional qualifying marks at the meet. Larson reached 200 feet, 10 inches, in the men's javelin; Short set a personal record by 13 feet in the women's javelin with a throw of 143 feet, 11 inches; and Collier won the women's shot put with a mark of 44 feet, 11 3/4 inches. On the track, sprinter Cody Warner won the 100- and 200-meter runs in 10.68 and 21.51 seconds, respectively, while Stephanie Stuckey took home the 800-meter title in 2:15.58. WOU will compete at the Saints Open on Saturday in Gresham.

## Central: Team goes 14-11

**Continued from Page 10A**

"Moving up to 5A was mentally tougher than I thought it was going to be," McDonald said. "The competition was great and didn't let up. In 4A you're going to show up, but there were some teams who were

weak and you could have a bad game and still pull out that win. In 5A, you're going to lose those games. The close games are going to be won or lost on mental decisions that your team makes. The girls have to be prepared to make those deci-

sions on their own. I saw a lot of growth in the mental aspect of the game.

"The girls kept the perspective that it's a long season and kept working at it..." she continued. "They did a good job focusing and got after it in any situation."

**CLASS 5A PREP BOYS BASKETBALL**

## Central goes cold

Panthers shoot 26 percent in loss

**By Lukas Eggen**

The Itemizer-Observer

EUGENE — The outside shot had been one of the Central boys basketball team's most dependable weapons during the regular season.

In the first round of the Class 5A state playoffs on Friday, the Panthers' strength turned into a nightmare during a 51-31 loss to Marist.

"During warmups, the hoop seemed really nice to us," Central senior Kaj Bansen said. "All our shots seemed to go in. As soon as the game started, it turned in (the Spartans') favor."

The first half saw the Panthers in a close battle, trailing 17-15 entering the break as neither team found any offensive rhythm.

"We wanted to keep pressure on their guards," Bansen said. "We thought they would make a couple of bad decisions and it would prevent them from getting the ball into the paint to their big men."

But Central went cold in the third quarter, making just one field goal as Marist extended its lead to 28-19.

The Panthers shot 26 percent from the field during the game, including 1 for 17 from beyond the 3-point line.

"We got the looks we wanted to," Central coach Tim Kreta said. "The kids worked their tails off (on Fri-



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

Central senior Kyler Fleming reacts after the Panthers' 51-31 loss to Marist on Friday night.

day). Kyler (Fleming), Kaj (Bansen), Josh (Smith) and all those guys executed our game plan. We had to take a few more gambles in the second half. Those gambles paid off, the buckets just didn't fall."

The Panthers opened the postseason with a 51-41 victory over Crater on March 3 in the state play-in round.

Bansen scored a game-high 20 points and Josh Smith added 12 points.

"We knew we had to lock down their shooters," Bansen said. "On offense, we knew we could run whatever we wanted because they didn't pressure the ball as much."

Central finished the year

with a 14-11 overall record in the team's first year in the Mid-Willamette Conference and at the Class 5A level.

The Panthers faced their share of adversity, including seeing senior Kyler Fleming miss nine games with a left hand injury before returning on Feb. 20. Yet, for every challenge, Central found a way to weather the storm, Bansen said.

"We had a rough year, but we stuck with it," Bansen said. "I think people thought we were going to be at the bottom in our league. That was a big motivator. We didn't want to be the last-place team. We wanted to prove everybody wrong."

**CLASS 5A PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL**

## Dallas falls in play-in

**By Lukas Eggen**

The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — For the third season in a row, Dallas' girls basketball squad entered the OSAA Class 5A play-in round with hopes of making a deep run in the state playoffs.

For the third year in a row, the Dragons were eliminated.

Dallas lost at home to Eagle Point 47-39 on March 4 as the Dragons saw their season come to an end.

"We had a great (year)," Dallas coach David Brautigam said. "The girls played together and were resilient and tough. We just had a disappointing end to a good season."

Senior Taylor Fennell scored a team-high 11 points, while Makenzie Davis added nine points for the Dragons, who led 21-18 at the half.

The Eagles took the lead for good in the third quarter and stretched their advantage to double digits in the fourth before holding off Dallas over the final minutes.

The Dragons finished the



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

Dallas sophomore Olivia Nelson attempts to drive the baseline against Eagle Point on March 4.

season 14-10 overall and 9-5 in Mid-Willamette Conference play.

Dallas' lineup will be vastly different next year compared to this season. Five seniors — Davis, Sarah Mitchell, Fennell, Brianna Classen and Eva Ronco — graduate. All five were starters or saw significant game action off the bench. It wasn't the end they en-

visioned, but Brautigam said the Dragons shouldn't hang their heads. And for the returning players, Brautigam hopes this experience helps drive them toward breaking through in the future.

"I'm very proud of our players, program, parents and coaches," Brautigam said. "It's fair to say that we will use this as nothing but motivation for next season."

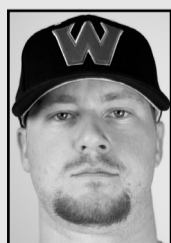
Itemizer-Observer

## Athlete of the Week



**Amanda Evola**  
Western Oregon

Evola, a senior outfielder for the WOU softball team, had a monster series against Northwest Nazarene. Evola recorded nine hits, six RBIs and five runs scored over the four-game series to lead the Wolves. Evola also hit two home runs, one in each of the final two games in Saturday's doubleheader, helping the Wolves to a 4-0 start in Great Northwest Athletic Conference play and earning GNAC softball Player of the Week honors.



**Garrett Harpole**  
Western Oregon

Harpole, a senior infielder for the WOU baseball team, helped spark the Wolves' offense against Central Washington. Harpole recorded seven hits and eight RBIs during the four-game series, including two doubles and a triple. Harpole had five hits and seven RBIs during the final two games of the series. Harpole was named the Great Northwest Athletic Conference's baseball Player of the Week.

To submit nominations for the Itemizer-Observer Athlete of the Week, contact Sports Editor Lukas Eggen at 503-623-2373 or leggen@polkio.com by 9 a.m. on Monday.

## Swing: WOU sweeps Crusaders

**Continued from Page 10A**

Those tweaks appear to be paying off in a big way for the Wolves.

Knowles leads the team in home runs with three and RBIs with 17, hitting in the cleanup spot.

Yet, Knowles is more than just a steady bat.

Her enthusiasm, even when she's not on the field, is infectious in the team's clubhouse.

"She brings so much (to the team)," WOU coach Lonny Sargent said. "Her enthusiasm, her hitting, her offense and defense and her love for the game is contagious. Our kids love that. When she's not in the game, she's just as powerful in the dugout. She's earned her role in the lineup and has been a wonderful presence for us."

Knowles played a key role as the Wolves swept Northwest Nazarene to open GNAC play. WOU won 6-2, 8-3 on Friday and 3-1, 14-2 on Saturday.

Knowles recorded five hits and four RBIs over the



Jennings

four-game series.

She wasn't the only one to see her bat come alive against the Crusaders.

Senior outfielder Amanda Evola had nine hits over the four games, including two home runs, while sophomore shortstop Lexi Jennings hit her first home run of the season — a grand slam — in the final game of the series.

Senior Jourdan Williams also hit a home run during the weekend's final contest.

"Amanda, she's just incredible," Sargent said. "To have a kid like that on your team and be that kind of leader, that's a big advantage for us. Lexi, we know she can hit and now she's starting to believe. She has so much power that is fun to watch."

Western Oregon (7-11 overall, 4-0 GNAC) entered

the week-end losing seven of its previous eight contests.

WOU showed glimpses of why it was the co-preseason favorite to win the conference against the Crusaders.

"All the little pieces start getting together," Knowles said. "We've learned that we've had to move forward from our nonconference schedule. That's what we did here, and that's the most important thing for us right now."

Junior pitcher Alyson Boytz threw a complete game in the third game of the series as the Wolves look to show its nonconference record wasn't indicative of the team's true talent and ability.

"After (the Desert Stinger in Las Vegas) it was tough," Sargent said. "We played some really good teams

down there. The biggest thing is that was our pre-season. Now, we have our conference (season) and hopefully, then our post-season if we are fortunate enough to make it. The overall record doesn't look as good, but we're 4-0 in conference and that's what we're focused on."

WOU hosted Northwest Christian Tuesday after press time.

The Wolves continue conference play this weekend, hosting Simon Fraser Saturday at 1 p.m. and Western Washington Sunday at noon for a pair of doubleheaders.

For Knowles, it's a continuation of a process to remember to keep clear eyes and a full heart each time she steps up to the plate.

"Confidence is key," Knowles said. "Community college was a lot faster than high school and Division II is a lot faster than community college, but I have to remember that I can compete at this level. That's the biggest thing."