

HIGH SCHOOL EQUESTRIAN

Central trio finds quick success

Panthers shattered expectations by qualifying for state as a team

By Lukas Eggen
The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — When seniors Taylor Knauss, Madeline Francis and junior Mari Whelton joined forces as the lone members on Central's equestrian team, expectations were low.

Even Panthers coach Christina Mauk had modest goals, at best.

"I really didn't think we'd be competitive in team penning," Mauk said. "They hadn't been a team for very long or had a lot of practice. (Team penning) is a very difficult class to master."

The trio had never ridden together prior to this season. But the girls, who qualified for Oregon High School Equestrian Team (OHSET) state championship May 14-17 in Redmond, are proving all doubters — including themselves — wrong.

Team penning consists of three riders working together to identify special cattle out of a herd and move them into a pen on the opposite end of the arena.

It can take a team years of practice to find the necessary chemistry to have success in the event. For Central's trio, it's been a matter of months.

"We weren't expecting to do well at all," Knauss said. "We just came in looking to have fun."

Prior to the team's first competition on Jan. 16, Mauk focused on teaching her riders the basics.

"What I did is I tried to help the kids understand how the event is scored," Mauk said. "I wanted the



Mari Whelton, Taylor Knauss and Madeline Francis, members of Central's equestrian team, qualified for the state championship in team penning.

LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

kids to have a strategy."

What followed, surprised everyone. The Panthers finished first, scoring 40 points.

"The first time, I thought it was a fluke," Francis said.

On Feb. 27, Central proved its win wasn't beginners luck, taking first again, clinching its spot in the state meet.

"I felt like we worked better knowing we weren't just there to mess around," Francis said. "We actually became more serious about it."

While the Panthers' results were surprising, Central had a secret weapon

that no one saw coming.

The trio showed something that teams can take years to build — trust. As the girls grew more comfortable with each other, the more improvement they showed.

"They're talking and working as a team," Mauk said. "If you try to work as an individual in that class, it will not work. I don't care how good you ride. You have to be a team. Everyone has their own job."

Knauss, Francis and Whelton may have started the season as strangers, but their love of riding allowed

them to grow close quickly.

"It's definitely a kind of therapy," Knauss said. "I love to ride horses just to get away from people. It's nice to just be away from the world and in my own little happy place."

What started as a low-key way to have a little fun was quickly turning into something much more serious.

"We've been practicing more," Whelton said. "We've been putting ourselves in different situations to see what would happen."

And while they are enjoying their triumphs so far,

they're not putting too much pressure on themselves going forward.

"I'm hoping to place well and that we try our best," Francis said.

Central will compete at the final district meet April 16-19, where the Panthers could qualify in up to six events for state, Mauk said, giving Central a chance to make an unexpected success even more of a surprise.

"This has been an amazing season for our little team," Mauk said. "This is why I do it. This is a team

State bound

- Central's team penning squad qualified for the OHSET state championship by taking first in each of the first two district meets.

- Mari Whelton also qualified for state in driving.

- The final district meet takes place April 16-19 in Albany.

- State competitions will take place May 14-17 in Redmond.

building and character building sport. What they've been able to pull off is pretty cool."

SPORTS BRIEFS

Sign-ups open for cycling road race

INDEPENDENCE — Registration is open for the Cherry Pie Road Race on Sunday, which begins at City Hall in Independence, 555 Main St.

Online registration is available through noon Saturday at obra.org/person_session/new.

Cost is \$30 for adults and \$15 for juniors. Day-of-race registration is available on Sunday for \$35 for adults and \$20 for juniors.

Course maps are available online at www.ridewithgps.com/events/2015-Cherry-Pie-2.

All races start and end by City Hall in Independence. Sessions begin at 10 a.m. Sunday with distances ranging from 31.2 miles to 88.5 miles.

For more information: www.obra.org/flyers/2015/cherry-pie_2015.pdf.

Swinehart competes in California

REDDING, Calif. — Central senior Tanner Swinehart competed at the Senior All-Star Three-way Dual on Saturday. Wrestlers from California, Washington and Oregon competed at the event.

Swinehart went 2-0, defeating Javier Contreras from California by major decision and earning a 3-2 decision over Conner Small from Washington.

Swinehart won an OSAA state wrestling championship at 170-pounds on March 1 over Bob Coleman from Hermiston. Swinehart finished his senior season with a 47-0 record.

WOU football schedule released

MONMOUTH — Western Oregon's 2015 football schedule has been released. The Wolves' lineup features 11 games, including six at McArthur Field: vs. Simon Fraser, Sept. 12; vs. North Alabama, Oct. 10; vs. Central Washington, Oct. 17; vs. Azusa Pacific, Oct. 31; vs. South Dakota School of Mines, Nov. 7; vs. Humboldt State, Nov. 14.

The full schedule is available at www.wouwolves.com/schedule.aspx?path=football.

Single game tickets will be available starting Aug. 1.

PREP BASEBALL ROUNDUP

Central wins big

Riddell hits triple, home run

Itemizer-Observer staff report

STAYTON — Central's baseball team opened its 2015 season with a bang. The Panthers defeated Stayton 19-1 on Monday.

Senior infielder Wes Riddell hit a home run and a triple to lead Central to the victory.

Jackson Holstad (two), Tyler Fleming and Luke McBeth recorded doubles for the Panthers, who scored 10 runs in the top of the seventh inning.

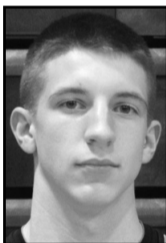
Central hosts Cascade Wednesday (today) at 3:30 p.m. before playing at Philomath Thursday at 4:30 p.m.

PIRATES WIN OPENER: Perrydale jumped out to a 7-0 lead before holding off a seventh-inning rally to earn a 7-4 win over Sheridan on Mon-

day. Senior pitcher Troy Trembly threw five shutouts in nings with 10 strikeouts to earn the victory.

Trembly, Haylen Janesofsky and Keenan Bailey recorded two hits each to lead the Pirates. Perrydale hosted Gaston Tuesday after press time. The Pirates host Crow Thursday at 4:30 p.m. before hosting a doubleheader against Portland Lutheran Monday at noon.

DALLAS OPENS SEASON: Dallas competed at the Silverton Jamboree to open the 2015 season on Monday. The Dragons faced host Silverton and McKay High School. No details were provided. The Dragons will compete at the Tigard Tournament. Dallas opens tournament play against Putnam Saturday at 12:15 p.m. before facing Hillsboro Sunday at 1:15 p.m. and Tigard Monday at 4:45 p.m.



Fleming



Trembly

CLASS 2A-1A PREP SOFTBALL

Pirates win opener

Itemizer-Observer staff report

SHERIDAN — Perrydale's softball team opened its 2015 season with a 15-3 win over Sheridan on Monday. No de-

tails were provided.

The Pirates played Gaston Tuesday after press time.

Perrydale hosts Crow Thursday at 4:30 p.m.

Pratt: Crusaders up next for WOU

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WOU plays at Northwest Nazarene for a pair of doubleheaders on March 27 and 28.

The Wolves return home April 9 against Lewis-Clark State for a nonleague matchup.

As Western Oregon seems to be hitting its stride, Pratt

is confident the Wolves are set up to bring home another regular season conference title to Monmouth.

"I think we're in a good spot right now," Pratt said. "We just have to keep taking it one game at a time and enjoy it because you never know what's going to happen out there."

COLLEGE NOTEBOOK

McCarron returns to Bradley

Itemizer-Observer staff report

Caitlyn McCarron of Dallas is back for her sophomore season with the Bradley University softball team in Peoria, Ill. The 2013 Dallas graduate is an infielder who bats left-handed and throws right-handed. She saw limited action as a true freshman last season.

Branden Cutsforth of Independence is gearing up for his first season with the Treasure Valley Community College baseball team in Ontario. Cutsforth, who medically redshirted last season after recovering from Tommy John surgery, is a hard-throwing 6-foot-2, 205-pound right-handed pitcher who is expected to contend for one of the starting spots in the Chukars' rotation. Cutsforth is a 2013 graduate of Central High School.

Danielle Ackerman has returned for her sophomore season with the Corban University softball team in Salem. Ackerman is a catcher/second baseman for the Warriors. She is batting .308 during the early portion of the 2015 season. Ackerman is a 2013 graduate of Dallas High School.

Carla Oberst of Monmouth is back for the spring portion of the 2014-15 rowing season at the University of Massachusetts. She is a 2012 graduate of Central High School.

Bret Moskal of Dallas is on the roster of the 2015 Clark College baseball team. Moskal is a sophomore catcher for the Penguins of Vancouver, Wash. He is a 2013 graduate of Dallas High School.

Zane West of Independence is a member of the 2015 men's track and field team at Corban University in Salem. West, a 2014 graduate of Central High School, is a freshman distance runner for the Warriors.

Bryce Baucum, a 2013 graduate of Perrydale High School, has returned for her second season with the softball team at Clark College in Vancouver, Wash. Baucum is a pitcher for the Penguins.

Information for College Notebook comes from college and university sports information departments. To submit an item or a tip for an upcoming College Notebook, send it via email to iosports@polkio.com or contact Sports Editor Lukas Eggen at 503-623-2373 or leggen@polkio.com.

Itemizer-Observer

Athlete of the Week



Badane Sultessa Western Oregon

Sultessa, a junior, had a banner day at the NCAA Division II Indoor Track and Field Championship on Saturday. Sultessa finished fourth in the men's 800-meter run final in 1 minute, 51.36 seconds. Sultessa earned All-American honors for his finish, becoming the third WOU athlete to earn NCAA Div. II All-American honors in the 800, joining Zeke Van Patten and Chris Olsen, who accomplished the feat in 2009 and 2013, respectively.



Wes Riddell Central High

Riddell, a senior infielder, opened the 2015 baseball season in grand fashion. Riddell hit a home run as Central rolled to a 19-1 victory over Stayton on Monday night. Riddell also hit a triple during the victory to help spur the offense, which recorded 17 hits during the nonleague contest. Riddell will look to continue his strong opening game when the Panthers host Cascade Wednesday (today) at 3:30 p.m.

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.