

COLLEGE BASEBALL

Western Oregon preps for tournament

Wolves to face Northwest Nazarene, Montana State Billings on Thursday



Western Oregon's Adam Bloom dives back toward first during the Wolves' final game against Northwest Nazarene on Saturday afternoon. WOU won 7-6.

Itemizer-Observer staff report

MONMOUTH—The time for talk is over. Western Oregon's baseball team enters the Great Northwest Athletic Conference baseball championships as the second seed.

But the Wolves know they can't take anything for granted.

WOU opens play against Northwest Nazarene Thursday at noon — a team it defeated in three of four games last weekend.

Western Oregon defeated the Crusaders 11-3, 1-0 on Friday before splitting a doubleheader on Saturday, falling 8-7 in 12 innings and winning 7-6.

With three of the four contests decided by a single run, players and coaches know Northwest Nazarene presents a tough challenge.

"NNU has a quality lineup and very good starting pitching," Wolves coach Kellen Walker said. "They have a couple of guys who are coming out of the (bull) pen that give your hitters a tough look. It's a balanced team that we know we will have to play well against to

GNAC

• Western Oregon faces Northwest Nazarene and Montana State Billings on Thursday at the Great Northwest Athletic Conference baseball championship.

• The number of games Friday depends on each team's record on Thursday.

come away with a win."

The Wolves enter the tournament winners of five of their last seven games. Along with top-seeded Montana State Billings will play each other on Thursday. The number of games on Friday depends on how each team fares on Thursday.

At the plate, Matt Taylor has led the Wolves, recording a team-high 69 hits, while batting .377. Pitcher Jesse Pratt, who is 7-1 in 12 appearances with a 2.62 ERA, will likely see significant action on the pitcher's mound for Western Oregon. "The tournament needs to be important to us," Walker said. "I think we are playing our best baseball right

now and have been able to battle back from a tough start to our season. It's important that we play with the energy we did (against Northwest Nazarene)."

In the end, the difference will be which team can keep its focus the best.

"Your focus definitely has to be minimized to being locked in to every pitch," Walker said. "If you look at a tournament situation from any other standpoint than the next pitch, you can get yourself in trouble. Teams that are able to play well for an entire nine innings will come away with wins."

Of note: On Monday, WOU had 10 players named to the all-GNAC team. Jesse Pratt received Pitcher of the Year honors, while Brady Miller was named Freshman of the Year.

Along with Pratt, Garret Harpole, Matt Taylor, Shawn Domke and Nathan Etheridge were part of the first team.

Miller, Garrett Alvarez, Darien Moran and Cody Sullivan received second team honors, while Marcus Hinkle received honorable mention.

PREP TENNIS ROUNDUP

Dallas boys tennis drops a pair of league matches

Itemizer-Observer staff report

DALLAS — Dallas' boys tennis squad dropped a pair of league matches, falling to Corvallis 7-1 on April 29 and Crescent Valley 6-2 on Friday.

The doubles pair of Cole Oace and Caedmon Blair

went 2-0 during the matches for the Dragons.

Dallas plays at Silverton Wednesday (today) before hosting Central Thursday at 4 p.m.

CENTRAL BOYS DROP THREE: Central's boys tennis team lost a trio of league

matches. The Panthers fell to Lebanon 4-4, dropping the tiebreaker 10 sets to 8 on April 29, Silverton 6-2 on Friday and Corvallis 8-0 on Monday. The doubles pair of Edoardo Sanna and Kevin Cable went 2-1 to help lead the Panthers. Central hosts Woodburn Wednesday (today) at 4 p.m. before play-

ing at Dallas Thursday at 4 p.m.

DALLAS GIRLS LOSE TWO: Dallas' girls tennis team struggled against Crescent Valley and Corvallis, falling 8-0 to the Raiders on April 28 and 7-1 to the Spartans on April 29. The Dragons host Silverton Wednesday (today) at 4 p.m. in

their final home match of the season before playing at Central Thursday at 4 p.m.

CENTRAL GIRLS FALL: The Central girls team lost a pair of league matches, falling to Silverton 6-2 on Friday and Corvallis 8-0 on Monday. The Silver Foxes and Panthers also completed an earlier match that

was postponed due to weather. Central lost 7-1. The doubles pairs of Patience Teague and Karlee Hernandez, and Andrea Garibay and Lauran Martinez earned wins for the Panthers in the second match. Central plays at Woodburn Wednesday (today) before hosting Dallas Thursday at 4 p.m.

WESTERN OREGON ROUNDUP

WOU falls short in tourney

Itemizer-Observer staff report

YAKIMA, Wash. — Western Oregon's bid for a repeat title fell short at the Great Northwest Athletic Conference softball championships last week.

The Wolves, who entered the four-team tournament as the No. 4 seed, lost to top-ranked Saint Martin's 8-5 on Thursday and to Western Washington 8-3 on Friday.

Senior Amanda Evola had

three hits against the Saints to lead WOU, which fell behind 3-0 in the first inning.

Against the Vikings, the Wolves jumped out to a 3-0 lead headed into the bottom of the third inning, but Western Washington scored the final eight runs of the game to eliminate Western Oregon.

The Wolves finished 21-28 overall.

TRACK PREPS FOR GNAC CHAMPIONSHIPS: Western Oregon's track and field team had several strong performances in the team's final meets before the GNAC championships. Junior Sam Moore set a personal record in the heptathlon, scoring 4,048 points, while finishing eighth at the GNAC

multi-event championships at Saint Martin's on April 27 and 28. Freshman Cody Warner finished second in the men's 100-meter run at the Oregon State University High Performance Meet on Friday. Warner crossed the finish line in a time of 10.68 seconds. Junior Justin Larson placed third in the javelin with a throw of 200 feet, 4¼ inches in Corvallis. In the team's final meet of the week, WOU set 14 personal records at the Mount Hood Track and Field Festival on Saturday. Among them included senior Laura Knudson, who won the women's 400 hurdles in 1:05.16. Western Oregon will host the GNAC Outdoor Track and Field Championships on Friday and Saturday. Events begin at 2 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m. Saturday.

Dragons: Dallas hopes to clinch second seed

Continued from Page 10A

"I anticipated parity to be better with Central coming in," Dragons coach Al Perkins said. "West Albany had typically dominated, and everyone else was playing for second. This year, first place is up for grabs. I didn't anticipate this many schools would be so close together."

Silverton (11-2 MWC), Central (11-3 MWC), Lebanon (11-4 MWC) and Dallas (10-5 MWC) entered the week with a chance at winning the regular season league title, or facing the possibility of finishing fourth or lower.

El-Hato and Erin Taylor

give the Dragons depth at pitcher, a key advantage, Perkins said.

That depth showed up against Woodburn on Friday, where Taylor and pitcher Keisha Sickles combined to throw a perfect game.

Now, it's a matter of putting all the pieces together.

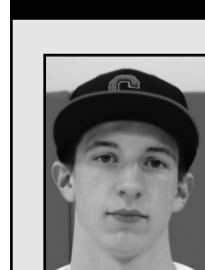
"We've had players take some time to settle in," Perkins said. "At the start of the season, our power hitters were hitting well, but the end of our lineup was struggling a bit. Now, the end of the lineup is hitting well and our power hitters are going through a bit of a struggle. We haven't played our best game yet."

The top two teams in the league gain an automatic berth into the OSAA's 16-team bracket. The third through sixth seeds will compete in the play-in round. The third- and fourth-place teams will host, while the fifth- and sixth-place teams will play on the road against a Midwestern League opponent.

But such a tight race doesn't worry El-Hato. In fact, she's excited to face the challenge.

"I think the competition is best for us," El-Hato said. "We do well under pressure. We just need to bring it all together, and we will succeed in the playoffs."

Itemizer-Observer
Athlete of the Week



Kyler Fleming
Central High

Fleming, a senior, played a major role in Central's baseball team's sweep of South Albany. Fleming hit a double in the series' first game. But his greatest impact came in the series finale, when Fleming stepped up to the plate with the bases loaded. Fleming's grand slam helped propel the Panthers to the big victory, helping Central keep pace in the competitive Mid-Willamette Conference.



Erin Taylor
Dallas High

Taylor, a senior, was part of a punishing one-two punch in the pitcher's circle against Woodburn on Friday. Along with Keisha Sickles, Taylor helped the Dragons shut out the Bulldogs 17-0, throwing a combined perfect game along the way. The pair had a combined seven strikeouts in five innings of work. Taylor and Sickles were also effective at the plate. Each recorded a double during the big victory.

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.

Hedrick: Ready to prove himself

Continued from Page 10A

Hedrick, who led the Broncos to the Mountain West Conference title and a victory in the Fiesta Bowl during his senior season, hadn't considered a career in the NFL until recently.

"It's always a dream for any kid to play in the NFL one day," Hedrick said. "But then you see how difficult it is to get there. I was glad to play college football at Boise and get that opportunity. Then, I had some success and I realized that I might be able to do this a little while longer. Halfway through my senior season, I realized I may have a shot."

Hedrick led the nation in completion percentage (71 percent) during his senior campaign, when he threw for 3,696 yards and averaged 306.3 total yards per game.

If he passes his tryout, he could have the chance to learn from Peyton Manning.

"It's a good spot," Hedrick said. "You could learn from one of the best to ever play the game in Peyton Man-



BOISE STATE MEDIA RELATIONS/for the Itemizer-Observer
Grant Hedrick (right) helped lead Boise State to a Mountain West Conference title.

ning. John Elway is the (general manager) there. It's a great opportunity to compete. For me, that's all I wanted was a shot to go compete somewhere."

Whether Hedrick's tryout leads to a stint with the Broncos remains to be seen. But for Hedrick, just getting the chance to do what he loves makes the whole experience worth it.

"I'm glad to do this a little while longer," Hedrick said. "Who knows, it might last a week or two years. I just want to do this as long as I can and then, eventually I'll grow up and get a real job."