

COLLEGE SOFTBALL

Weather wreaks havoc on WOU's home schedule

By Lukas Eggen
The Itemizer-Observer

HILLSBORO — Thanks to a two-game sweep of Saint Martin's, Western Oregon softball coach Lonny Sargent surpassed 300 career victories on Saturday. Junior infielder Lexi Jennings had walkoff hits in both of the matchups, helping the Wolves defeat the Saints 4-2 and 4-3.

In game one, a two-run home run by Destiny Kuehl tied the game in the sixth inning and Jennings hit a two-run home run in the seventh to clinch the victory.

In game two, Jennings hit to center field in the eighth inning — driving in the winning run once again.

"I think we have a lot of fight," Kuehl said. "Even at the end of a game, we don't give up. Even the freshmen are stepping up. Everyone

brings something to the team."

The Wolves split a double-header with Central Washington on Friday, winning 3-2 before dropping the second game 2-1.

The only thing that would have made the moment sweeter was if the games had taken place at home — a luxury that WOU hasn't yet experienced in 2016.

Weather conditions have forced home matchups to be delayed, moved or canceled.

"It really took a turn when we played Central Washington (on March 6)," Sargent said. "We were expecting to be at home, and that made a huge difference in our season, I think. Players were bummed. Family members were bummed. We're really good at home. The bad thing is, we don't get to play at home for a while. Other



PHOTO COURTESY OF WOU SOFTBALL/Itemizer-Observer
The rainy weather has made Western Oregon's softball field unplayable. WOU has yet to have a home game.

people are able to play at their fields. That's a bummer for us to walk away from here."

The Wolves dropped that doubleheader.

The source of WOU's home field woes is the rain and an outfield that can't

drain quickly enough.

"Our infield is in great shape," Sargent said. "We have a great tarp and can get that ready. If our outfield had a better drainage system, we could have been playing on it (last weekend)."

Instead, Western Oregon

has seen home games become road games or neutral-site games. Players hope the team's success over the weekend is a sign that the Wolves won't be bothered by playing on the road anymore.

"I think it was stressful at the beginning because everyone wants to play at home," Kuehl said. "Coach told us that everyone has games pushed back. We have to find a way to fight through it."

Kuehl has been a bright spot for the Wolves.

The junior leads the team in home runs with seven, runs scored (21) and RBIs (24) and is second on the squad in hits (32) and batting average (.432).

"I don't think up there," Kuehl said. "I see the ball and hit the ball. My mindset is I just can't give up. I can't let my team down."

Western Oregon will compete at the Tournament of Champions in California this weekend before hosting four straight days of conference home games April 9-12.

If the weather doesn't cooperate then, the Wolves (15-15 overall, 10-10 Great Northwest Athletic Conference) are facing potentially a full season on the road, but Sargent isn't about to let that do the Wolves in.

"We're facing the fact that we might not play at home at all this year," Sargent said. "... We're coming together as a group, which is fun to watch. Our leadership this year has been really good. We are just making a big switch mentally and knowing that we've lost a few games we could have won. We know we have to compete well in order to challenge and possibly beat these teams."

COLLEGE ATHLETICS

Baseball drops two of three to MSUB

Itemizer-Observer staff report

BILLINGS, Mont. — Western Oregon's baseball team got off to a strong start before dropping two of three



Snyder

games against Montana State Billings on Saturday and Sunday. The Wolves won the opening

matchup 10-0 on Saturday and lost the other two. Junior Nick Snyder hit a three-run home run in the first inning to get the offense going, while Marcus Madden hit a three RBI triple to round out the scoring in the seventh inning. Pitcher Brady Miller threw six strikeouts in 5 2/3 innings to earn the victory on the mound.

The Wolves dropped the

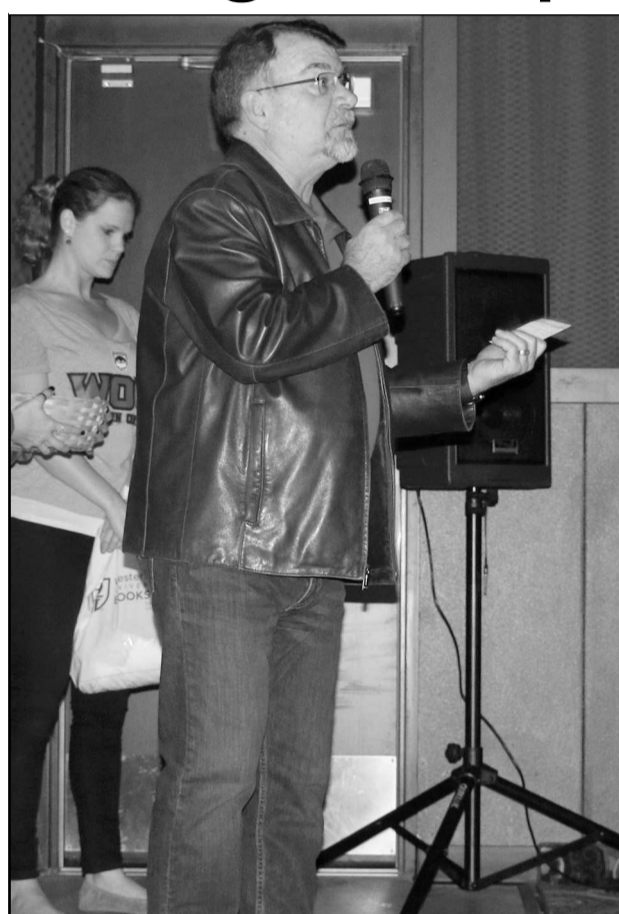
second game of the double-header 8-7.

In the final game of the series, WOU fell 6-1.

Western Oregon (10-13 overall, 5-8 Great Northwest Athletic Conference) plays at Central Washington for a pair of doubleheaders on Saturday and Sunday.

TRACK AND FIELD EXCELS AT WILLAMETTE: Western Oregon's track and field team had a strong showing at the Willamette Invitational in Salem on Saturday. Suzanne Van De Grift won the women's 800-meter run in 2 minutes, 13.04 seconds. Emily Wetherell won the hammer with a throw of 162 feet, 11 inches, and Megan Rose placed second in the 400 (58.0 seconds). Cody Warner took first in the men's 200 (21.55) and second in the 100 (10.78). Aaron Whitaker won the 400 (49.08). WOU will send athletes to the Stanford Invitational and the San Francisco State Distance Carnival on Friday and Saturday.

Let's get fired up



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer
Western Oregon University President Rex Fuller addressed the crowd at the WOU watch party at Independence Cinema on March 23.

DALLAS ROUNDUP

Baseball splits games

Itemizer-Observer staff report

BOISE — Dallas' baseball team went 2-2 at the Bucks Bag Tournament Thursday through Saturday.

The Dragons defeated Bishop Kelley 6-4 on Thursday before falling to Emmett 3-1 on Friday morning.

Dallas bounced back with an 18-4 victory over Idaho Falls on Friday afternoon and dropped their final game of the tournament to Madison 12-4.

Pitcher Tucker Weaver threw a one-hitter against Bishop Kelley. Weaver had nine strikeouts during the victory.

Tanner Earhart led the Dragons against Idaho Falls, going four for five at the plate.

Dallas finished nonleague play with a 2-3 record overall.

The Dragons hosted Lebanon Tuesday after press time to open Mid-Willamette Conference play. Dallas travels to Lebanon Wednesday (today) before hosting the Warriors Friday at 4:30 p.m.

The Dragons face Woodburn on Tuesday.

BOYS TENNIS FALLS TO McMinnville: Dallas' boys tennis squad played at McMinnville on Monday afternoon. No details were provided by press time. The Dragons played Woodburn Tuesday after press time. Dallas hosts Central Thursday at 4 p.m. and South Albany Tuesday at 4 p.m.

BOYS GOLF: Dallas' boys golf team was scheduled to compete in Corvallis on Monday. No details were provided. The Dragons will compete at Cross Creek Golf Course in Dallas on Monday at 11 a.m.

Pack: Players fed off of community's support

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"It's been a great ride, honestly," senior guard Devon Alexander said. "I'm very, very happy and pleased with how everything turned out. ... It's been an experience of a lifetime."

Among the accomplishments included the school's first No. 1 ranking, first Great Northwest Athletic Conference tournament title, first win in the NCAA Division II tournament, most wins in a single season (31) and the first Final Four berth in program history.

Throughout the season, players had the same mantra: Keep looking forward. Now, they realize the full scope of what they accomplished.

"It happened too fast," redshirt sophomore Tanner Omlid said. "You never really understand what you were

doing in the moment until you take a step back."

WOU brought together a unique mix of players. Julian Nichols transferred prior to the 2014-15 season after spending a season at a junior college and wasn't even on a roster the year before.

Alexander came the summer before his freshman year when former coach Brady Bergeson offered him a spot when a late opening presented itself.

Omlid transferred from Army after suffering a knee injury.

"It's a blessing how everything blossomed," Alexander said. "... Everything seemed to turned out the way it was supposed to. All the hard work. All the losses. It gave you that experience that you needed to get to the next level."

The community took no-

vice. In previous years, the team drew hundreds of fans. This season, that grew to more than 1,000 fans on a consistent basis and cracked the 2,000 mark.

For the Wolves' Elite Eight game against Saginaw Valley State, WOU held watch parties on campus and at Independence Cinema.

"We have community members, alumni, Wolves club supporters, students and businesses coming together left and right," WOU Alumni Relations Coordinator Emily Lafon said. "This is the biggest conglomeration of everything we have had in a while."

Players couldn't help but feel the energy.

"You could tell the community just bought in and realized this team is doing something really big here," Alexander said. "You started

seeing the stands get more and more filled. There were spots you'd never see filled my freshman year that were this year. The community stood behind us all the way."

Whether it was a fan writing coach Jim Shaw an email thanking them for the thrills or a kid coming up to players after a game, the community's support did wonders for the Wolves.

"It feels so good because you almost feel like a little bit of a professional athlete," Alexander said. "In a sense, you're acting professionally through the school. You're representing something more than yourself. You can put a smile on a kid's face like Kobe, Michael or LeBron does for us. It gives you a sense of pride and integrity. It makes you work that much harder."



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer
Devon Alexander returns to Western Oregon on Friday after the Wolves' trip to the Elite Eight in Frisco, Texas.

WOU's historic season is officially over, though 11 players are set to return next season. But for everyone involved, the memory of what they accomplished won't be fading anytime soon.

"We want to thank everyone, the players, the coaches, the community, for a great ride," Alexander said. "And I want to thank God. Something like this doesn't come around too often."

CENTRAL SOFTBALL

Panthers tweak lineup at the start of league

Central sees two nonleague games canceled due to weather conditions

By Lukas Eggen
The Itemizer-Observer

SANDY — Central's softball team didn't get all of the preparation it hoped before the start of league play, but Panthers coach Kendra George is excited to see her team take shape.

Central, which saw two of its four nonleague contests canceled due to weather, fell to Sandy 9-7 on Saturday. But the Panthers, which opened the season with an 11-0 win over Taft, weren't discouraged.

George said she's seeing

the makings of a strong team that will feature a lot of depth.

"We're going to play around with the lineup," George said. "We have a lot of talent and a lot of girls who can play different positions. We're definitely going to be moving around a little bit."

That depth extends to the plate as well.

Sarah Helyer and Kyra Noon each hit one home run against Taft; Gabby Cisneros and Mollee Carter hit triples, while Aunika Farley went 2 for 3.

"It's exciting," George said. "I'll think, I only have nine spots and I have a lot of girls who can hit really well. It's a good problem to have."

Central opened Mid-Willamette Conference play against South Albany Tuesday after press time.

The Panthers play at Dallas Thursday at 4:30 p.m. before hosting Crescent Valley Friday at 4:30 p.m. Central plays at Lebanon on Tuesday.

In spite of missing half of their nonleague games, George is confident about

where Central stands entering league play. She's not done tinkering with the lineup, and is sure that no matter who is out there, the Panthers are ready to compete with the league's best.

"You've got to roll with the punches," George said. "We're a talented team this year. The girls came out and were aggressive at the plate, which I like. It was nice to finally get out there and play, but there's always stuff for us to work on. That's the way things go in softball — there's always room for improvement."

CENTRAL ROUNDUP

Baseball splits games

Itemizer-Observer staff report

AURORA — Central's baseball team split its games at the North Marion Spring Break Series on March 23.

The Panthers defeated Gladstone 7-4 before falling to Tualatin 7-1.

Against Gladstone, the Panthers overcame a 3-1 deficit thanks in large part to a four-run fifth inning. Pitcher Humberto Alarcon earned the victory on the mound. Peter Mendazona (two), Luis Amador and David Avila all hit doubles.

The Panthers opened Mid-Willamette Conference play against Woodburn Tuesday after press time. Central plays at Woodburn

Wednesday (today) and hosts the Bulldogs Friday at 4:30 p.m. The Panthers play at Lebanon Tuesday and host the Warriors on April 6.

TRACK DUO COMPETES AT SUMMIT: Central sophomores Jaxon Hutchinson and Josh Dickson competed at the Summit Decathlon/Heptathlon on Friday. Hutchinson's day was highlighted by a second-place finish in the 400-meter run (53.90 seconds) and a fifth-place finish in the 100 (11.82). Dickson's day featured a fourth-place finish in the 110 hurdles (17.51) and a fifth-place finish in the long jump (5.56 meters). Central hosts Silverton Wednesday (today) at 4 p.m. The Panthers will host Dallas on April 6 at 4:30 p.m.