

CENTRAL BASEBALL

Senior embraces competitive nature

By Lukas Eggen
The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — There isn't much Central senior Luke McBeth doesn't get competitive over — even when it's a “friendly” game among family members.

“I'll play table tennis with my family and I'll start yelling at my sister or other family members when they're not doing something right,” McBeth said. “I get a little too excited sometimes. It can be positive or negative. It depends on which way you use it.”

Baseball has always held a special place in McBeth's heart. At 5-foot-6, 180 pounds, McBeth isn't the most physically imposing player, but that's part of what makes him love the game even more.

“You don't have to be the biggest guy to be good at (baseball),” McBeth said. “Jose Altuve is my favorite player (in the MLB) because he's 5-foot-5. He's representing the short people. I'm only 5-6. Sports like football are kind of hard because you're going to get rocked by bigger guys like Marlon (Tuipulotu). Baseball is a mind game, and you don't have to be the biggest guy to be the best.”

At the core of his success is his competitive drive, which was on full display during the Panthers' 4-3 win over South Albany on April 27.

With the game tied at three in the top of the seventh inning, McBeth switched from catcher to



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

Central senior Luke McBeth waits for a pitch during the Panthers' game against South Albany on April 27.

pitcher with the bases loaded and two outs.

“As a catcher, you get a feel for what you don't like to see,” McBeth said. “What you don't like to see are balls and walks. I thought if I could pound the strike zone, I'll get an out. I throw decent enough that I can get someone to ground out, strike out or pop out.”

McBeth struck out the batter. “Luke is the most competitive person I've ever coached, in a good way,” Panthers coach Zach Miller said. “He lives for that moment and he wants the ball in

that situation.”

In the bottom of the eighth, Luis Amador drove in the winning run on a walk off RBI single.

The catcher/pitcher is both an offensive and defensive force. At the plate, McBeth leads the Panthers in batting average and hits.

“I've been keeping it simple,” McBeth said. “I'm only using one bat. The past couple of years, I changed my bat.”

The senior also provides the Panthers a steady hand behind the plate — something that wasn't always part of the plan.

Furious finish

- Central's baseball team took two of three from South Albany.
- The Panthers dropped the series opener 5-1 on April 26 before winning 4-3 on April 27 and 9-0 on Monday.
- Central opened a three-game series with Dallas Tuesday after press time. The teams also clash Wednesday (today) and Friday.

Prior to his junior year, McBeth played in the outfield before necessity led him to make the switch to catcher.

“It was a very hard transition,” McBeth said. “I'm used to playing left field and center field. Now, all of a sudden you're getting every single pitch. I'm not the best blocker or at kicking my feet out, but it's a work in progress.”

McBeth's competitive nature is what's driven him to success — but it can also be his biggest road-block.

“It's challenged me to reel him back in at certain points,” Miller said. “He's always fired up. Whether he lines out a few feet from the wall and a fielder makes a great play, he's upset he didn't get the hit. Sometimes, that gets him into trouble and can take a toll on him mentally. We want to keep him even-keeled.”

He's been able to hone his competitiveness in all positives.

“(I try to) focus on one goal and make it simple for myself,” McBeth said. “I think about what I want to do. If I get mad about the past,



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

Luke McBeth switched from catcher to pitcher against South Albany on April 27.

you're not going to be successful in the present. I want to stay competitive but stay focused on what's at hand.”

He hopes his competitiveness rubs off on his teammates. Entering the final two series of the regular season, Central was tied for fourth in the Mid-Willamette Conference with Silverton — one game behind Dallas for third. The third and fourth seeds host a play-in game. The fifth- and sixth-place teams go on the road.

But for now, McBeth isn't worried about what may happen.

“We need to focus on the now,” McBeth said. “We will play competitive, hard-nosed baseball the rest of the year.”

WESTERN OREGON ROUNDUP

Softball falls short at GNAC tourney

Itemizer-Observer staff report

LACEY, Wash. — Western Oregon's softball team entered Saturday needing a single victory to win the Great Northwest Athletic Conference tournament title.

The Wolves couldn't close the deal, falling to Central Washington 11-2 and 9-3.

WOU opened the tournament with a 3-1 win over Concordia on Thursday and a 4-0 win over Saint Martin's on Friday.



Jennings

WOU jumped out to a 2-0 lead in the first game on Saturday thanks to a two-run home run by Lexi Jennings, but the Wildcats ended the game scoring 11 unanswered runs — setting up a winner-take-all finale.

The Wolves fell behind 3-0 after the first inning of the second game and couldn't close the gap.

WOU finished the 2016 season with a 31-24 record overall.

TRACK EXCELS AT TITAN TWILIGHT MEET: Western Oregon's track and field teams excelled at the Titan Twilight Meet on Thursday.

Laura Patrick won the women's 100-meter run with a time of 12.40 seconds. Suzie

Van De Grift (2:13.18), Megan Rose (2:13.22), Olivia Woods (2:13.55) and Bailey Beeson (2:13.63) took the top four spots in the women's 800.

Aaron Whitaker won the men's 400 in 48.89 seconds, while Josh Dempsey placed second in the men's 800 (1:51.00).

WOU also competed at the Oregon State High Performance Meet on Friday and Saturday.

Woods ran a personal best time of 56.66 seconds in the women's 400.

Badane Sultessa and Dempsey took second and third in the men's 800, finishing in 1:50.93 and 1:51.03, respectively.

Western Oregon will send athletes to the Oregon Twilight meet in Eugene, the Linfield Open in McMinnville and the Oxy Invite in Los Angeles on Saturday in the team's final meets before the GNAC Championship May 13-14 at WOU.

FOOTBALL TO HOST SPRING GAME: Western Oregon's football team will host its spring game Saturday at 3 p.m. at McArthur Field.

There is no cost to attend and a family barbecue will be held immediately following the game.

The Wolves finished 7-4 overall and 5-1 in GNAC play, good for second place.

The day's festivities begin at 1 p.m. with a free Lil' Wolves clinic for kids ages 3-13.

For more information: Trey Shimabukuro, tshimabukuro09@mail.wou.edu.

DALLAS ROUNDUP

Girls tennis defeats Central

Itemizer-Observer staff report

DALLAS — Dallas' girls tennis team defeated Central 6-2 on Thursday.

The match resumed after being postponed on April 22 due to weather.

The Dragons swept the doubles matches as Addie Gillette and Lynn Gumpinger, Megan Ronco and Amanda Shafer, Makayli



Gillette

Laizure and Kloe Totten, and Emma Cromwell and Emily Cuneo earned wins.

Molly Peffley and Silja Bjoerrebj earned singles victories.

Dallas opened the week with an 8-0 loss to Corvallis on April 27.

The Dragons played Lebanon Tuesday after press time. Dallas plays at Silverton Wednesday (today) before hosting Crescent Valley on Thursday. Both matches are scheduled to begin at 4 p.m.

GIRLS GOLF BEGINS DISTRICT PLAY: Dallas' girls golf team began play at the Mid-Willamette Conference Regional tournament at Quail Valley in Banks Tuesday after press time. The tournament concludes Wednesday (today).

Head to www.polkio.com for results when they become available.

BOYS TRACK TAKES THIRD:



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

Dallas' Morgan Bateman returns a shot against Central's Kylie Smith during their match on Thursday.



White

Aaron White finished first in the boys triple jump with a leap of 41 feet, 9 ½ inches,

Dallas' boys track and field team finished third at the Rob Allen Twilight Invitational on Friday. The girls placed sixth.



Benz

seconds. T.J. Cross (4:22.06) took second in the 1,500-meter run and Trevor Cross (9:33.90)

while the 4 x 100 relay team of Jacob Deming, Cody Webb, Aaron White and Justin Huxel took first, finishing in 44.31

took second in the 3,000 to lead the boys.

Kyleen Benz took second in the shot put (35-3 ¾) and Naomi Howe placed second in the 300 hurdles (47.48) to lead the girls.

Jennifer Webb finished third in the 100 hurdles (16.90) and Kayley Sayer placed third in the triple jump (34-3 ¾).

Dallas opened the week falling to South Albany in a dual meet on April 26.

The Dragons will compete at Corvallis Wednesday (today) at 4 p.m. in the team's final meet before the Mid-Willamette Conference District Championships May 11-12 at Central.

BASEBALL TAKES TWO OF THREE: Dallas' baseball team won two of three games against Corvallis last week. The Dragons dropped the series opener 9-4 on April 26 before winning 5-4 on Thursday and 6-5 on Friday.

Clay Coxen helped fuel the win on Thursday, going three-for-four at the plate, including a double and a triple.

Dallas needed a little late game magic to earn the win on Friday.

Trailing 5-4 in the bottom of the ninth, the Dragons scored twice, thanks to a misplayed ball in right field, to earn the win.

Dallas opened a three-game set with Central Tuesday after press time.

The Dragons host Central Wednesday (today) at 3 p.m. before playing at Central Friday at 3:30 p.m.

Dallas opens its final series of the regular season by hosting South Albany Tuesday at 4:30 p.m.

Central: Panthers' duo will contend for state berth



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

Hassan Eltelbany and Brice Spreadbury discuss the first set of their match on April 27.

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The two were good friends long before they began playing tennis together.

That chemistry allowed them to learn — and criticize — each other's strengths and weaknesses more easily.

“I think it's a huge thing,” Spreadbury said. “If you and your partner aren't friends or aren't on good terms, it really affects your play.”

Their friendship is a major reason why Panthers coach Patty Youngren saw potential in the pair.

“Brice and Hassan have similar skills and personalities,” Youngren said. “... Their passion for tennis binds them.”

The duo's friendship can also have its downsides —

especially when ego comes into play.

“I feel like we almost try to compete against each other sometimes,” Spreadbury said. “We should be working as one, not seeing who can do better, and I think we do that sometimes.”

But those moments are few and far between and the pair seems poised to be one of the main contenders to earn one of four berths to state at the Mid-Willamette Conference district tournament later this month.

Perhaps the most surprising development for each is a newfound love for doubles.

“I think in the beginning of the season I was missing singles,” Eltelbany said. “I was missing that every

point is on you. I think about the midway point of the season, I felt that I was super happy that I played doubles. It's a good experience. It's always fun to know that Brice and I have a good opportunity to go to state. We're excited for the rest of the season.”

If they earn their trip to state, it will be mission accomplished — and the realization of a dream they've had for years.

“It'd mean a lot,” Spreadbury said. “Ever since freshman year, I wanted to go to state. The whole reason we went doubles is because we didn't see we had a chance in state for singles, so we told each other, let's get to state in doubles.”