

QUICK HITS

Youth football signups open

INDEPENDENCE — Central Youth Sports will hold football registration sessions Wednesday (today) and Thursday from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at Panther Stadium at Central High School.

Oak Knoll to host golf tourney

INDEPENDENCE — Oak Knoll Golf Course, 6335 Highway 22, Independence, will hold the Jim Vanderfeen Memorial Tournament June 25 at 11 a.m.

Cost is \$240 per team for the four-man scramble. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to Shriner's Hospital.

For more information: 503-378-0344.

Signups open for tennis tourney

MONMOUTH/INDEPENDENCE — Registration is open for the 43rd annual Monmouth-Independence Fourth of July Tennis Tournament July 2 and 3 at Central High School and Western Oregon University.

Brackets for singles and doubles of all skill levels are available. There will also be a father/son and mother/daughter bracket.

Forms are available online at www.oregontennis.com.

Cost is \$15 for singles and \$25 for doubles.

For more information: 503-623-2998.

Registration is due by June 29.

Avgi named GNAC Athlete of the Year

MONMOUTH — Western Oregon senior Andy Avgi was named the 2015-16 Great Northwest Athletic Conference Male Athlete of the Year on Friday.

Avgi, a 6-foot-6, 260-pound forward on WOU's men's basketball team, was named a preseason and postseason All-American.

Avgi led the Wolves in scoring, helping the team reach the its first trip to the Division II Final Four. Avgi was second in the GNAC in scoring (19.4 points per game).

He also competed for the football team in the fall, catching 12 passes for 192 yards and four touchdowns.

Avgi is the third athlete in WOU history to earn the award. Grady Wood (2011-12, baseball) and Mike Hinshaw (2001-2002, football and track and field) were the others.

Signups open for co-ed softball

DALLAS — Registration is open for Dallas' co-ed softball league. Deadline is June 17 and cost is \$200 per team.

Games will be held Tuesdays and/or Thursdays at 6 or 7:15 p.m. beginning Tuesday.

Forms are available online at www.ci.dallas.or.us/756/Adult-Recreation.

For more information: David Brautigam, 503-831-3559.

2016 ITEMIZER-OBSERVER ALL-REGION SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Throwing heat

El-Hato a triple threat for Dallas

By Lukas Eggen

The Itemizer-ObsERVER

DALLAS — There was a time when Dallas High graduate Yasmine El-Hato wasn't sure if she'd ever be good at softball.

Luckily for her — and for the Dragons — that time quickly passed.

As the Dallas' top starting pitcher, El-Hato had a 2.4 ERA with 57 strikeouts in 93 1/3 innings of work. She also had a perfect fielding percentage while playing at first base, and a team-high 47 hits, six home runs and 50 RBIs at the plate.

Her ability to affect the game in all aspects makes her the *Itemizer-ObsERVER's* Softball Player of the Year, though she wasn't always the game-changing player she is today.

El-Hato had a familiar start to her softball career, taking up the sport for the first

time as a young child.

Any dreams of being naturally gifted, however, were soon dashed.

"I was put in the outfield because that's where the girls who weren't as good at softball were put when we were younger," El-Hato said. "Honestly, I wasn't the best player. I was never hitting. Pitching, I had no idea what I was doing. My parents had no idea because they had never played."

Around the age of 10, El-Hato had enough.

"I thought I need to get out (of the outfield)," El-Hato said with a smile.

She began taking lessons and, although it was a struggle at first, she was determined to make it work.

"Softball has always stuck with me," El-Hato said. "I wanted to be a leader. Being a pitcher helped me have more control and help other people out."

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BASKETBALL

Alexander chases pro basketball dream



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-ObsERVER file

Devon Alexander hopes to play professional basketball overseas this year.

By Lukas Eggen

The Itemizer-ObsERVER

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of stories following former WOU player Devon Alexander's attempt to play professional basketball overseas. Look for more stories about the challenges he faces and whether he reaches his ultimate goal. An audio version of this story can be heard at www.polkio.com.

MONMOUTH — For perhaps the first time in his collegiate career, Devon Alexander took a deep breath and smiled.

Western Oregon's men's basketball team had just finished a historic season, culminating with a trip to the NCAA Division II Final Four — a perfect cap to his senior season. It also meant for the first time, there were no more games to prepare for, no offseason programs to adhere to.

"As soon as we played that last game in the Final Four, I

sat back, took everything in and just relaxed," Alexander said. "It's been a grind like no other in my life. We put everything into this season."

It was, at long last, the end of an era.

But the closing of one chapter signals the start of a new one — the most challenging in his athletic life. Alexander isn't ready to walk away from the basketball court.

And he's willing to go anywhere in the world to see that happen.

Two weeks after the end of the men's basketball season, Alexander was back in the gym. This time, there were no teammates or coaches pushing him.

"Everyone has that dream of playing in the NBA," he said. "Then there's more realistic, true-to-you goals and realizing what's more possible."

For Alexander, that means playing overseas.

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Applegate, Diaz thrive as part of Blue Dolphins

By Lukas Eggen

The Itemizer-ObsERVER

DALLAS — Gabe Applegate loved the water, though the thought of racing never crossed his mind.

"I loved diving and doing the doggie paddle," he said.

But something about the challenge of competitive



Applegate

the Blue Dolphins after

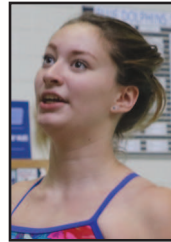
swimming proved irresistible.

"It looked like the hardest sport," he said.

Isabel Diaz joined watching her siblings, including 2016 Dallas High graduate Lucas Diaz, join the program.

"Before I joined, I used to like just splashing around," Diaz said.

Both swimmers soon discovered just what competitive swimming would be like.



Diaz

sure what competitive

"It was hard for me because I didn't know how a swim team operated," Diaz said.

Neither were quite

swimming would hold for them, but both have found they feel right at home.

The pair has become two of the Blue Dolphins most promising swimmers.

Diaz placed second in the girls 400-yard individual medley (13-14) in Albany on June 5.

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