

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Wolves turn to new faces to lead

By Lukas Eggen
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — Western Oregon's men's basketball team has a new look this season and a big challenge — how to follow a team responsible for the most prolific season in program history.

Western Oregon has four new starters — only junior forward Tanner Omlid returns — and a multitude of players who experienced their first game action for the Wolves.

“Those guys last year, some of them had gone to school together for four years,” coach Jim Shaw said. “They knew each other extraordinarily well as people and players. That part is hard to duplicate. When you blend new people into new roles, it's a process. These guys don't know each other very well as people or basketball players yet.”

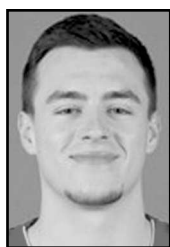
The lack of familiarity has led to some adjustments.

A year ago, WOU averaged 8.5 turnovers per game.

That number is up to 13.3 per contest through the team's first four games.

“Basketball is all about chemistry,” Omlid said. “We have to know how to get guys shots, how to get the advantage on every possession. We're still learning. We have to play smarter. It just takes time.”

A season ago, Omlid was one of the new kids on the block after transferring from the United States Military



Berg

“I'm not used to having this big of a leadership role since high school. I have to accept it and play better. I have to lead better overall and be a better basketball player.”

The junior is already one of the team's top playmakers on both ends of the court. His quickness and anticipation makes him a threat to get a steal and start a fast break. On offense, he has the range to hit the three, the speed to get to the rim, and the court vision to distribute the ball to an open teammate.

Omlid isn't the only threat WOU boasts.

Junior Ali Faruq-Bey leads the team in scoring (14.8 points per game), while junior Demetrius Trammell is shooting 47.8 percent from beyond the arc.

Junior Bryan Berg, a transfer from Clark College, is also expected to be a major offensive force. Berg averaged 17.6 points per game while shooting 56 percent from the field at Clark College last season.

“He just had a good overall package of character, work ethic and the right attitude,” Shaw said. “He displayed a lot of positives in a lot of different areas.”

Academy.

This time around, he's one of the veterans.

“It's different,” Omlid said.

Now it becomes a question of how quickly the team can come together.

“We're really looking at it as a day-by-day process,” Berg said. “We are getting stronger. We're communicating better and becoming better friends off the court.”

The Wolves won't be the same this year in offensive style. WOU will see more of a reliance on guard and wing production on offense.

What that final combination of players will be remains to be seen.

“Between now and Christmas we want to figure out a couple different things,” Shaw said. “We want to see how do we want to move with our starting lineup and rotation. The first month or two, we will try a few different things.”

A year ago, the Wolves' success was, in part, a culmination of years of playing together. WOU, which lost to San Francisco State 99-93 in triple overtime on Friday and to UC San Diego 75-63 on Saturday, hopes to find a similar level of chemistry and trust in a much shorter time period.

“Last weekend was the first time we went through some adversity this season,” Shaw said. “We'll see how they handle everything. The ceiling for this team is to improve. This is a group that should get better. Through all their unfamiliarity and uncertainty, that's the biggest challenge is to keep working to get to know each other better.”



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer
Western Oregon junior forward Tanner Omlid attempts to drive past a defender on Friday night. Omlid is the only returning starter.

WESTERN OREGON ROUNDUP

Women's basketball drops two in Chico

Itemizer-Observer staff report

CHICO, Calif. — Western Oregon's women's basketball team dropped both games at the Coslet Classic in California. The Wolves lost to Chico State 70-67 on Friday and Sonoma State 74-59 on Saturday.

Junior guard Shelby

Snook scored 25 points to lead WOU against Chico State. Junior forward Jasmine Miller added a career-high 19 points.

Kaylie Boschma led the Wolves against Sonoma State with 14 points, while Miller added 10 points and eight rebounds, but WOU

fell behind by six after the first quarter and could not rally.

“Sonoma came out ready to play, and they set the tone in the first quarter,” coach Holli Howard-Carpenter said. “... I'm most disappointed with our lack of focus to execute our defen-

sive game plan. We didn't take steps forward this weekend, but I know they will buckle down and get better this week.”

Western Oregon returns home to host Oregon Tech Saturday at 2 p.m. The Wolves open conference play at home on Dec. 1

against Seattle Pacific.

VOLLEYBALL ENDS SEASON WITH LOSSES: Western Oregon's volleyball team closed out the 2016 season with a pair of losses. The Wolves fell to Central Washington 25-20, 28-26, 25-22 on Thursday before losing to Northwest Nazarene 25-18, 25-23, 25-22 on Saturday.

Junior Alisha Bettinson recorded 10 kills and 13 digs against Central Washington.

Senior Amanda Short had 11 kills against Northwest Nazarene.

Western Oregon finished the season with a 10-17 record overall and a 7-13 mark in Great Northwest Athletic Conference play.

Dallas: Earhart rushes for 108 yards, one TD

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After a scoreless first quarter, a botched snap on a punt gave Lebanon the ball on Dallas' 4-yard line. The Warriors scored a touchdown on the next play and added a field goal just before halftime to take a 10-0 lead into the break.

Senior running back Tanner Earhart scored on a 7-yard run to pull Dallas within three with just under 10 minutes left in the game, but it's as close as the Dragons would draw.

“I was disappointed in our first-half production,” coach Tracy Jackson said. “But winners fix problems, and they fixed theirs. We put ourselves in a position to win. Maybe it was crappy play calling by me, I'm not sure, but we just couldn't get the job finished. It wasn't because they weren't capable. They showed they are capable in the second half. It wasn't our destiny to make it to the finals, but we have a lot to be proud of. They battled like champs.”

Earhart finished the game with 108 yards and a touchdown, but Lebanon held Earhart in check for much of the game, with nearly half of that total (42) coming on one play.

“They handled us up front really well,” senior Aaron White said. “We're a run-heavy offense, and it's hard to run against that.”

Despite the loss, the 2016 season was a success by any measure.

Jackson said he got a hint of what was to come during



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer
Dallas senior running back Tanner Earhart rushed for 108 yards and a touchdown against Wilsonville on Saturday.

the team's summer camp.

Few expected a run quite like this.

Dallas finished 7-2 in the regular season and defeated No. 9 Eagle Point and No. 1 Summit in the first two rounds of the state playoffs to advance to the semifinals for the first time since 1998.

Earhart also rushed for more than 2,000 yards and was named the Mid-Willamette Conference's Offensive Player of the Year.

“I think one thing with Tanner is he will get to a hole and keep his feet moving,” Jackson said. “That's something the great backs do. They keep moving forward, and if a tackler falters a little bit, he's going to break through.”

Throughout much of the

latter stages of the season, Jackson talked with his players about defining their legacy. In the end, players wanted that legacy to be about more than just them.

“That we showed heart,” Blair said. “That we really believe in Dragon pride and we believe in family and the community.”

The Dragons lost a heartbreaker to Lebanon on Saturday but that won't take away from what the team accomplished, Blair said.

“It was amazing,” he said. “The whole season we were thought of as underdogs. We were ranked like 26th before the season. Who thinks a team ranked 26th would reach the semifinals? Nobody thought that. It was a great ride.”

Central: Mendazona throws for 280 yards

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Wilsonville extended its lead to as many as 21 in the second half. Neville — a Washington State commit — finished the game with 392 yards and six total touchdowns.

“We tried hard to get pressure on him,” Hedrick said. “They're dialed in; they know what they want to do; and they do a nice job protecting him. I think our game plan was to get more pressure on him than we were able to.”

The Panthers used a variety of trick plays — with varying degrees of success — from completing a pass to Tuipulotu for a 6-yard gain to an attempted fake punt that ended in a pick six for Wilsonville.

Mendazona threw for 280 yards and five touchdowns.

Senior Peter Mason had six catches for 138 yards and two touchdowns, but the Wildcats' offense proved too much for the Panthers.

“Those 50/50 plays were just going their way,” Mason said. “The defense fought hard, but when those 50/50 balls came, it wasn't our turn. They made some great catches and some great plays.”

Central's 2016 season was one filled with ups and downs — but was a successful one.

“We had a really good season with a really good group of guys,” Mason said.

The Panthers advanced to the state playoffs despite dealing with a rash of injuries throughout the regular season. Central defeated No. 6 Sandy and No. 14 Redmond in the first two

rounds of the state playoffs. The team's semifinals appearance was the team's fifth since 2004 — but the Panthers' first since moving to Class 5A.

Tuipulotu, who will play college football at Washington, was named the Mid-Willamette Conference's Defensive Player of the Year.

It wasn't the finish they envisioned, but Hedrick's message to his players after the game was clear: This team has nothing to be ashamed of.

“I'm proud of how they've grown and matured and come together as a team,” Hedrick said. “I talked to the guys in the locker room and words were not hard to find. They were easy. I'm very proud of these kids, so incredibly proud.”



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer
Central prepares for a kick off against Wilsonville on Saturday at Hillsboro Stadium.