

CENTRAL BASKETBALL

Panthers to host Thurston in play-in game

Itemizer-Observer staff report

INDEPENDENCE — Central's girls basketball team is headed to the postseason and ready to go to war.

The Panthers closed out the regular season with a 59-44 loss to Corvallis on Feb. 22 before beating Woodburn 63-24 on Friday.

Meagan Mendazona scored a game-high 17 points against Woodburn. Elizabeth Chavez added 12 points, and Mariah Hyre recorded nine.

Central finished the regular season 11-11 overall and 8-6 in the Mid-Willamette



Mendazona

three of their last four games.

"I think the girls are improving every game, and I have seen a drastic improvement from preseason," coach Julie McDonald said.

"I like the style of ball we are playing right now and like

Conference — good for third place. The Panthers ended the regular season by winning

Panther playoff push

What: OSAA Class 5A girls state play-in game.
Who: Thurston (7-15 overall, No. 6 Midwestern League) vs. Central (11-11 overall, No. 3 Mid-Willamette Conference).
When: Wednesday (today), 6 p.m.
Where: Central High School.
Admission: Adults, \$6; students and children, \$4.
What's at stake: The winner advances to first round of the state playoffs on Saturday.

how we are working together as a team."

Now, the team's attention turns to making a deep post-season run.

That journey begins when

the Panthers host Thurston Wednesday (today) at 6 p.m. in the state play-in round. Thurston finished sixth in the Midwestern League with a 7-15 record overall and a 4-

10 mark in league play.

Thurston played one team from the MWC during the regular season, falling to Lebanon 55-35 on Dec. 17.

"Thurston changes up their defense, so it'll be interesting to see how they come out with their game plan to stop us," McDonald said. "We have a lot of weapons, so we will be ready for whatever they throw at us."

The winner advances to the first round of the state playoffs on Saturday. The winner of Saturday's game moves on to the state quar-

terfinals at Gill Coliseum in Corvallis on March 8.

McDonald believes the Panthers are ready for the challenges ahead after competing in a league that offered few chances to relax and relent. She hopes that means her team is battle-tested and ready to rock.

"Our league is one of the toughest in the state, and I feel that playing in our league will prepare us for Thurston," McDonald said. "We will continue to do what we do, which is focus on our team strengths and work for 32 minutes."

PERRYDALE BASKETBALL

Perrydale girls fall to Country Christian

Itemizer-Observer staff report

MOLALLA — Perrydale's girls basketball team saw its season come to an end in the first round of the 1A state playoffs.

The Pirates lost to Country Christian 54-32 on Feb. 22.

"I thought the girls played extremely hard," coach Terry Newton said. "Country is the defending state champion, and I believe they are one of the top four or five teams in the state."

The Pirates finished the season with a 14-12 record

overall and 7-5 in Casco League play.

"It was up and down, I won't lie," Newton said. "Sometimes, our youth could be frustrated when they don't quite see all the pieces of the puzzle. But other times, it was tremen-

dous. ... I'd especially like to thank our seniors, Sierra Starr and Breana Pettit, for really working hard and committing to this program."

Perrydale will lose two players to graduation. While this season may have

had its growing pains, Newton is excited to see what the future may hold for the Pirates going forward.

"Whatever the future holds for them, it will be tremendous," Newton said. "These are all home-grown

girls, no transfers or foreign exchange students. This program has been built from the ground up, and I think it will continue to be that way. I'm proud of this group. They never stopped competing, and we couldn't have asked for more."

Central: Six Panthers place at state tourney



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

Central wrestler Caleb Sedlacek finished sixth at state.

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"I'm very excited I placed first in state," Negrete said. "I've always wanted to do this. It's a great feeling to know I could do it and show my teammates that they can also do this by practicing and conditioning all the time."

Negrete and Casteel were tied at two in the third round and appeared headed to overtime — but Negrete wasn't going to have it, scoring in the final minute to secure the victory.

"I knew I had to do something," Negrete said. "I knew I couldn't pin him, but I knew I could score back points."

Finding ways to come out on top is something Negrete has displayed throughout his career. He finds ways to surprise those around him — even his coaches.

"He's been doing that all year long," coach Van Holstad said. "He creates stuff on the fly. He shows us stuff we've never seen before, and we've been around this sport a long time. It's exciting every time he steps on the mat, and you never know what you're going to get. We thought David was going to be able to ride him out in the third round and then get a takedown in overtime, then he pulls that out and gets back points. It's awesome. He's a great kid and one of those guys you really root for. The fact that he thinks of the program first

See more photos

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is the kind of kid he is. He's selfless and a good kid."

Negrete was one of four state placers for the Panthers. Sam Crow (195) finished fourth, Noah Worthington (106) and Caleb Sedlacek (285) placed sixth.

Chris Polanco (160), Adam Morales (170) and Erik Vasquez (182) also competed, but did not place.

While not all wrestlers placed, Holstad said everyone gave it their all and have nothing to hang their heads about.

"David getting to the finals and winning was nice, but we struggled a little in some matches," Holstad said. "But it is state, and it's the last tournament for a reason. Our guys battled like warriors, and they made Panther nation proud. All the boys worked really hard and I'm proud of all of them. I'm proud to be associated with those guys."

As Negrete capped his high school career with a perfect finish, the senior was quick to say his victory was never just his own.

"I love my family, my teammates and my coaches. This is for them," Negrete said. "This feels great. That's all I can say."

Dallas: Dragons finish second to Crater

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Earhart earned a 7-6 decision over Pendleton's Morgan Holcomb to win his title.

"Tanner makes us look good, that's the bottom line," coach Tony Olliff said. "... He's mild mannered. He's not boastful and is the kind of person that people like."

Not long after winning his title, he was sitting, watching his younger brother, Treve, wrestle in the 195-pound finals.

"My favorite thing about this year is that my brother gets to have this opportunity," Tanner said.

When Treve fell to Bunker Parrish of Redmond, it was Tanner who was there to console and support him.

"I remember when Tanner and Treve first got together and Tanner had already had a year in our room," Olliff said. "I remember talking to him and telling him it's OK when you wrestle each other in practice to get

right up to the brink of fighting but always know that you need each other. They know that. There's no way they'd be in the state finals without each other."

Tanner and Treve helped push each other every step of the way and it paid off in a big way at state.

"It was one of the best years of wrestling with my brother because at the beginning of the year, he told me, 'let's be state champs,'" Treve said. "We pushed each other and got each other tough. The last few weeks were emotional because I knew in the back of my head this was the end of our time together in the mat room."

The Earhart family has a long, rich tradition in wrestling. Tanner and Treve's father, Jeff, won a state title in 1987 — along with Tony Olliff. Seeing his sons also connect with Tony made the moment all the more special.

"Our head coach was Tony's dad, Paul," Jeff said. "Paul was a father figure

and a mentor to me so to see Tanner embrace coach Olliff after the final match was pretty emotional to me and a true blessing that my words can't express."

Seeing both his sons perform so well at state was a moment he'll never forget and made the journey well worth taking.

"I am proud of Tanner and Treve," Jeff said. "They had killer seasons that gave our family that awesome emotional roller-coaster ride that comes with the sport. The greatest blessing I think Steph and I had was seeing our kids come together with their guard down, and truly support each other for the common goal of making each other better."

Tanner was one of eight Dragon wrestlers to place at state. Treve Earhart (195) and Clay Coxen (182) finished second. Jacob Jones (126) placed third; Ryan Bibler (106) took fourth, Dawson Barcroft (113) placed fifth and

Joseph English (138) and Joseph Foster (126) finished sixth.

Dallas finished second in the team standings behind Crater.

"I'm extremely proud of Treve," Olliff said. "He weighs 176 pounds and wrestled 195. It showed against the kid in the state finals, but only just a little bit. Clay (Coxen) had a fantastic season. This is nothing but gold. Every single person that we brought contributed to our team score. That trophy we got, each guy gets a little piece of it."

Olliff is also excited about the future of Dallas wrestling as the Dragons look to reload and compete for a state title for years to come.

"This team returns six state placers," Olliff said. "I don't know if that's the most we've ever returned, but it sure is a lot. The guys who will come back, this is money in the bank. They've been here, experienced and seen it."



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

Dallas' Treve Earhart battle Central's Sam Crow in the semifinals on Saturday.

DALLAS SOCCER

Dallas hires Steele to lead girls soccer team

Itemizer-Observer staff report

DALLAS — Dallas High School athletic director Tim Larson announced Monday that Kendra Steele has been

hired to become head coach of the girls soccer team.

Steele is a special education teacher at the high school. She is a former Dal-

las athlete and played soccer at the collegiate level at Eastern Oregon University.

She has also served as an assistant soccer coach with

the Dragons.

Steele will take over from Ron Brooks.

The Dragons finished 3-11 overall and 2-5 in Mid-

Willamette Conference play last season, finishing sixth in the league standings. Dallas advanced to the state play-in round.

"We are thrilled she is joining our coaching staff," Larson said. "She brings an energy the kids feed off of and a wealth of knowledge."