

PREP CROSS-COUNTRY

# Coach seeks elusive accomplishment

**By Lukas Eggen**  
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — When cross-country coach Monique Lankheet joined Dallas High School in 1996, it was never meant to be her final stop as a coach.

Dallas was her first job after graduating from Western Oregon University — but something unexpected happened.

“My son graduated, and I thought it might be fun to coach at a bigger school or a school with a little more money,” Lankheet said. “I kept getting attached to the kids. I kept saying after you

graduate, I’ll go. No, after you graduate, I’ll leave.”

After more than two decades at Dallas, Lankheet has become synonymous with the Dragons’ cross-country program.

“Now, I’m here to stay,” she said.

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The world of running has always intrigued Lankheet, but she lacked the opportunities to run competitively.

“I’ve always been a runner, but I wasn’t born in the right generation,” she said. “We didn’t have athletics at my high school, but I learned how to do and write workouts. I’d read

books on training.”

When she arrived at Western Oregon University, she was approached by another student about joining the cross-country team.

Lankheet had her reservations since she had never run competitively on a team before. She eventually caved in and tried out for the team — and made it.

“The cool thing about it is it gave me confidence,” Lankheet said. “I don’t know that I learned a ton from being on the team, but I felt like, now I’m a runner. Kids respect that. Now, when I tell them this is what we’re going to do, they go, ‘Oh, you were

a runner, so it’s OK.’ I understood the commitment and saw the coach’s role on a team. I don’t know if I’d be coaching if I hadn’t made the team.”

When she came to Dallas, Lankheet understood how to write workouts and had a plan how to best train her runners.

What she wasn’t prepared for was finding the balance between training her athletes as runners and as people.

“In the beginning I had so many rules,” she said. “You have to do this or that. Then, I was super easy where you could do anything wrong

and you’re still on the team.”

It took some time, but she realized cross-country was as much about developing people as it was about runners.

“I was more worried about whether people liked being on the team than developing some character,” Lankheet said. “Now for me, it’s more about providing experiences that can last a lifetime. Hard work, dedication, supporting your teammates, these are things that you have to do as runners, as business people and as family members.”

Dallas has accomplished a lot during Lankheet’s tenure.

There’s just one thing she’s hoping changes. She’s never taken a team to state.

“I think this is the year,” Lankheet said. “I’m optimistic we can do it. I want it mainly for the kids to experience that joy and be proud of their accomplishments.”

Staying at Dallas may not have been her original plan, but today, Lankheet can’t see herself coaching anywhere else. Above all else, it’s become her home.

“I feel like this is my program, like this is home,” she said. “I’ve watched it grow and develop with the help of a lot of people. It’s been a really fun experience.”

CENTRAL VOLLEYBALL

## Panthers earn five set victory over Stayton

**Itemizer-Observer staff report**  
INDEPENDENCE — Central’s volleyball team opened the 2017 season with a 23-25, 25-22, 25-22, 23-25, 15-6 win over Stayton on Thursday.

“We got some of the nerves out in that first match,” coach Claudine Mendazona said.

The win wasn’t always pretty. The Panthers led for much of the first set before Stayton rallied. Combined with early season jitters, Mendazona said there’s plenty of room for improvement.

“We weren’t firing on all cylinders,” she said. “There’s a lot of stuff we need to sharpen up. We’re going to



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get our rotation where it needs to be. We’ve made some changes weekly and that can be

hard for the girls to deal with that. Luckily, we have a few preseason matches. We can make the adjustments we need to make, which is big for us.”

Central plays at North Marion Thursday at 4:30 p.m. before opening Mid-Willamette Conference play at home against Silverton Tuesday at 6 p.m.

## Sending it back



Grace Holstad (11) attempts to spike the ball during Central’s victory over Stayton on Thursday evening.

LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

## Wolves: Western Oregon finished tied for third in 2016



The Wolves finished tied for third in the Great Northwest Athletic Conference in 2016.

LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer file

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Torreahno Sweet returns as the top running back, though Fenumiai is the team’s top returning rusher.

Linebackers Bo Highburger and Tyler Johnson will help anchor the defense. Highburger led the Wolves in tackles in 2016 with 111, while Johnson recorded 65 tackles, five sacks and an interception. Highburger was a first team all-conference selection. Johnson was named to the second team.

“Their speed and ability to make plays is starting to stand out,” Ferguson said.

Senior defensive lineman Michael Kluge, who earned

an all-GNAC honorable mention in 2016, will have a shot to be a more disruptive force in opponents’ backfields.

Western Oregon’s ability to get consistent pressure will be imperative as an inexperienced secondary tries to learn on of the fly.

“The secondary guys are fairly new,” Ferguson said. “They’re working hard to get used to each other, but it’s going to take some time.”

WOU’s schedule will be difficult. The Wolves open the season against Division I school Idaho State on Thursday.

“They are a fast and a

physical team,” Ferguson said. “It will be a good test for us. Last year, we were successful, but that was last year. We’re not going to sneak up on anybody.”

Western Oregon’s first home game won’t be until Sept. 23 when the team hosts Humboldt State after road games against Central Washington and Western New Mexico.

If the Wolves can get steady play from their defensive backs and a steady hand at quarterback, Ferguson expects to see WOU in the thick of the conference title race.

“We’re excited to see what we can do,” Ferguson said.

## Serving it up



Central junior Elizabeth Chavez goes up for a serve during the first set of Central’s season-opening victory over Thurston on Thursday evening. The Panthers won 23-25, 25-22, 25-22, 23-25, 15-6. Central opens Mid-Willamette Conference play on Tuesday at 6 p.m. when the Panthers host Silverton.

LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

PERRYDALE VOLLEYBALL

## Pirates go 6-2 at tournament

**Itemizer-Observer staff report**

MOLALLA — Perrydale’s volleyball team went 6-2 at the 1A Season Preview on Friday and Saturday at Country Christian High School.

The Pirates went 2-2 on Friday, falling to Country Christian 25-15, 25-11 and North Douglas 26-24, 25-21 and defeating Joseph 25-16, 25-21 and Ione 25-11, 25-15.

Perrydale won all four matches on Saturday, beating Powder Valley 25-18, 23-25, 15-9; Trinity Lutheran 25-17, 25-9; Hosanna Christian 25-15, 23-25, 16-14; and South Wasco County 25-15, 25-20.

“We started our season out strong,” coach Denise Dickey said. “I am very happy with how our team is playing. We have not had

a lot of gym time, so I am hoping to see some big improvements in our offense.”

The Pirates hosted Falls City Tuesday after press time.

Perrydale plays Triad and North Clackamas Christian Thursday at 4:45 and 6:30 p.m., respectively, before hosting Livingstone Adventist Tuesday at 6 p.m.

FALLS CITY VOLLEYBALL

## Falls City defeats Southwest Christian

**Itemizer-Observer staff report**

FALLS CITY — Falls City’s volleyball team defeated Southwest Christian 25-16, 25-18, 25-17 on Friday in the

team’s first match of the 2017 season.

The Mountaineers played at Perrydale Tuesday after press time.

Falls City plays at Crosshill Christian Tuesday at 6 p.m.

The Mountaineers host Livingstone Adventist on Sept. 6 at 6 p.m.

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