

Sports

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Mounties open with win

By Ronald Bond
The (La Grande) Observer

Eastern Oregon’s home opener against College of Idaho had a similar feel to the Mountaineers’ home opener against Southern Oregon two years ago — EOU holding a late lead, trying to keep its opponent from marching downfield on its final possession.

Like that 2016 opener, this one went the way of the home team.

Kai Quinn passed for 326 yards and ran for a touchdown, Victor Dias added two rushing scores and the Mountaineers opened the 2018 season — and christened the new turf at Community Stadium — with a hard-fought 24-21 win over College of Idaho Saturday night.

“Super proud of the kids,” EOU head coach Tim Camp said. “We’ve worked super hard since Aug. 5 to get to this point. They talk about grit. They talk about resilience. We have really good senior leaders. They made some plays.”

Eastern never trailed in winning its fourth straight home opener and ending a two-game slide against the Yotes.

But C of I pushed EOU to the limits late. The Mountaineers seemed in control

with a 24-14 lead before the Yotes’ Isaiah Abdul returned a blocked punt 37 yards for a touchdown to make it a three-point game with 6:17 to play in the game.

“That was a huge play by them. Credit them,” Camp said, adding he should have called a different block formation on the punt. “That’s something we have to get fixed. We just have to execute.”

EOU managed to burn nearly 4-1/2 minutes off the clock on the ensuing drive, but couldn’t run it out, giving C of I a chance. The Yotes, on the arm of backup quarterback Nathaniel Holcomb, drove to the EOU 43 yard line in just over a minute, aiming for at least a tying field goal.

But a fourth-down pass in the waning seconds went high and through the hands of C of I receiver Wes Fitzpatrick to seal the victory.

“The kids were locked in on the sidelines,” Camp said. “Our discipline was better. That was the one thing about fall camp. We have to be disciplined to win those close games. We got a couple pass interference calls late, but they held tight. Defense got a couple picks. I would like to finish it out offensively, but at the same time we’re in the infancy stages of this.”

Referee shortage affecting high school sporting events

Baker School District

The number of available high school sports officials is so low this year that some football games are being rescheduled.

Pete Caldwell, football commissioner for Northeastern Oregon, had 33 officials last year. This season he has 23, and four of those are currently fighting fires. Football games need four officials at 1A, 2A and 3A level and five for 4A games.

An issue came up right away when Caldwell saw 12 games scheduled for Sept. 7. He said schools have already agreed to move games to either Thursday or Saturday.

“We’re truly having a hard time covering games,” Caldwell said.

In some cases, he can have officials work two games in one day — one in the afternoon and another in the evening. His area covers football games in Baker, La Grande, Joseph, Enterprise, Elgin, Union, Cove, Imbler, North Powder, Pine-Eagle, Burnt River, John Day and Dayville-Monument.

New officials receive training — including on the job — and are paired with a veteran official. Pay per game varies from \$40 to \$60, depending on the level.

“You’ve got to do it for the love of the game,” Caldwell said. “You want to help the kids out and still be involved in the game.”

This is Caldwell’s fifth year as football commissioner.

“To be honest, this is the most trying year,” he said.

Dave Comfort is also facing a shortage of officials for basketball, softball and baseball. Last year, he had seven available for baseball, and seven for softball. Each event, which is typically a doubleheader, requires two officials.

“If La Grande and Baker were both home on the same day, I couldn’t cover anything else,” he said. “At some point, this will affect the ability of schools to even schedule games.”

Basketball season has more games to cover than any other sport, and right now Comfort has 37 officials to cover more than 900 games. His area includes 13 high schools, plus several junior highs.

The challenge, he said, is that every school has a

full set of games — JV and varsity for both girls and boys. Two officials can cover two games, which means he needs a total of four for each event. La Grande now requests three officials per game, which is the standard at state championships. Prior to having both his knees replaced, Comfort was officiating five to seven basketball games a week.

“And there were guys doing more than me,” he said.

Both Caldwell and Comfort say one of the toughest parts of officiating is conflicts with the coaches or parents. Official meetings help with this, Comfort said, because they talk about crowd responses and go over game situations.

As for games, Comfort pairs new officials with veterans.

“The best way is to send them with a senior partner who will totally have their back,” Comfort said.

He said junior high games are a good place to start officiating.

“You can get your sea legs doing junior high games,” he said.

Aside from recruiting new officials, retention can also be an issue.

“It’s difficult to keep them for more than two years,” he said. “It’s disappointing when you get that second-year guy, he’s excited about it — then he moves.”

Jack Foliard, executive director of the Oregon Athletic Officials Association, said the shortage of officials is a widespread problem.

“It’s a huge issue across the state in all sports, and an issue across the nation,” he said.

Foliard has tracked a decline of officials over the past nine years.

“We’ve lost 18 percent of our officials. And the number of contests hasn’t gone down,” he said.

Plus, the current officials are aging — he said the average age is 48.

“There are some sports with a lot of physical requirements,” he said.

He’s also noticed that fewer teachers are officiating now as compared to in the past.

“Teachers make great officials,” he said.

Foliard said he sees several factors that may keep people from becom-

ing officials. First, there are inevitable conflicts with fans and coaches.

“You do have to have a thick skin,” he said.

Another factor is employment — officiating afternoon games requires a flexible job. Foliard said there were more officials during the recession because employment was down and people needed extra money.

Although, at this point games are being rescheduled, he said the lack of officials could result in the cancelation of games at lower levels.

“If we continue to lose at the same rate, some games will not be able to be played,” he said.

Foliard officiated Pac-12 football for more than 30 years. He still officiates high school basketball games.

“It’s a great way to give back, a great way to stay in shape and you make a little money,” he said.

Volleyball officials are also needed. The Northeast Oregon Association currently has 15 officials, which Heidi Justus, the association’s commissioner, says is fairly consistent with past years. However, “more officials are always welcome,” she said.

“On days when there are multiple matches and/or tournaments scheduled, scheduling enough officials can become very creative to cover all the matches,” she said.

Each volleyball match requires two officials. She said the association covers many junior high matches in addition to high school.

To become an official or for more information, go to www.osaa.org and click on “Become an official.”

Candidates must be older than 18, register with OSAA and pass a background check. Another resource for information is www.osaa.org/new-officials/index.html.

The commissioners for each sport are listed online at www.osaa.org/officials along with their contact information. Contacts for the Northeast Oregon area are:

- Pete Caldwell: 541-910-7020
- Dave Comfort: 541-910-3754
- Heidi Justus: neovba@gmail.com

War hero, U.S. senator, presidential candidate John McCain dies at 81

By Nancy Benac
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sen. John McCain, who faced down his captors in a Vietnam prisoner of war camp with jut-jawed defiance and later turned his rebellious streak into a 35-year political career that took him to Congress and the Republican presidential nomination, died Saturday after battling brain cancer for more than a year. He was 81.

McCain, with his irascible grin and fighter-pilot moxie, was a fearless and outspoken voice on policy and politics to the end, unswerving in his defense of democratic values and unflinching in his criticism of his fellow Republican, President Donald Trump. He was elected to the Senate from Arizona six times but twice thwarted in seeking the presidency.

An upstart presidential bid in 2000 didn’t last long. Eight years later, he fought back from the brink of defeat to win the GOP nomination, only to be overpowered by Democrat Barack Obama. McCain chose a little-known Alaska governor as his running mate in that race, and turned Sarah Palin into a national political figure.

After losing to Obama in an electoral landslide, McCain returned to the Senate determined not to be defined by a failed presidential campaign in which his reputation as a maverick had faded. In the politics of the moment and in national political debate over the decades, McCain energetically advanced his ideas and punched back hard at critics — Trump not least among them.

The scion of a decorated military family, McCain embraced his role as chairman of the Armed Services Committee, pushing for aggressive U.S. military intervention overseas and eager to contribute to “defeating the forces of radical Islam that want to destroy America.”

Asked how he wanted to be remembered, McCain said simply: “That I made a major contribution to the defense of the nation.”

One dramatic vote he cast in the twilight of his career in 2017 will not soon be forgotten, either: As the decisive “no” on Senate GOP legislation to repeal the Affordable Care Act, McCain became the unlikely savior of Obama’s trademark legislative achievement.

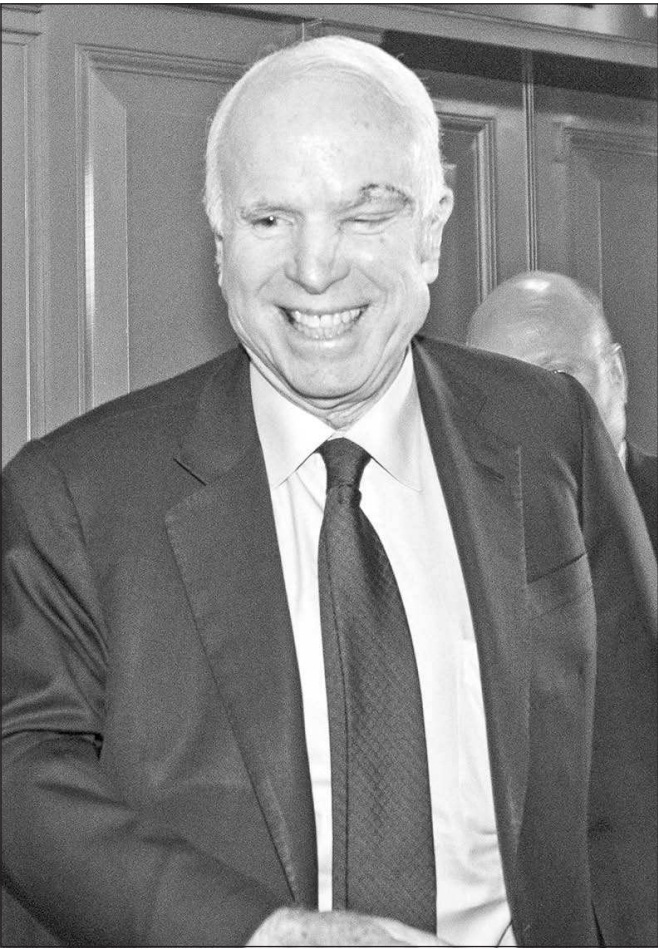
Taking a long look back in his valedictory memoir, “The Restless Wave,” McCain wrote of the world he inhabited: “I hate to leave it. But I don’t have a complaint. Not one. It’s been quite a ride. I’ve known great passions, seen amazing wonders, fought in a war, and helped make a peace. ... I made a small place for myself in the story of America and the history of my times.”

Throughout his long tenure in Congress, McCain played his role with trademark verve, at one hearing dismissing a protester by calling out, “Get out of here, you low-life scum.”

But it was just as notable when he held his sharp tongue, in service of a party or political gain.

Most remarkably, he stuck by Trump as the party’s 2016 presidential nominee even when Trump questioned his status as a war hero by saying: “I like people who weren’t captured.” McCain declared the comment offensive to veterans, but urged the men “put it behind us and move forward.”

His breaking point with Trump was the release a



Alex Edelman / Zuma Press-TNS

Sen. John McCain

month before the election of a lewd audio in which Trump said he could kiss and grab women. McCain withdrew his support and said he’d write in “some good conservative Republican who’s qualified to be president.”

By the time McCain cast his vote against the GOP health bill, six months into Trump’s presidency, the two men were openly at odds. Trump railed against McCain publicly over the vote, and McCain remarked that he no longer listened to what Trump had to say because “there’s no point in it.”

By then, McCain had disclosed his brain cancer diagnosis and returned to Arizona to seek treatment. His vote to kill the GOP’s years-long Obamacare repeal drive — an issue McCain himself had campaigned on — came not long after the diagnosis, a surprising capstone to his legislative career.

In his final months, McCain did not go quietly, frequently jabbing at Trump and his policies from the remove of his Hidden Valley family retreat in Arizona. He opposed the president’s nominee for CIA director because of her past role in overseeing torture, scolded Trump for alienating U.S. allies at an international summit, labeled the administration’s zero-tolerance immigration policy “an affront to the decency of the American people” and denounced the Trump-Putin summit in Helsinki as a “tragic mistake” in which the president put on “one of the most disgraceful performances by an American president in memory.”

On Aug. 13, Trump signed into law a \$716 billion defense

policy bill named in honor of the senator. Trump signed the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act in a ceremony at a military base in New York — without one mention of McCain.

John Sidney McCain III was born in 1936 in the Panama Canal zone, where his father was stationed in the military.

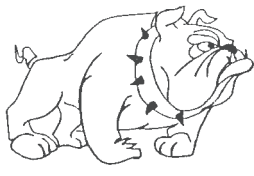
He followed his father and grandfather, the Navy’s first father-and-son set of four-star admirals, to the Naval Academy, where he enrolled in what he described as a “four-year course of insubordination and rebellion.” His family yawned at the performance. A predilection for what McCain described as “quick tempers, adventurous spirits, and love for the country’s uniform” was encoded in his family DNA.

In October 1967, McCain was on his 23rd bombing round over North Vietnam when he was shot out of the sky and taken prisoner.

Year upon year of solitary confinement, deprivation, beatings and other acts of torture left McCain so despairing that at one point he weakly attempted suicide. But he also later wrote that his captors had spared him the worst of the abuse inflicted on POWs because his father was a famous admiral. “I knew that my father’s identity was directly related to my survival,” he wrote in one of his books.

When McCain’s Vietnamese captors offered him early release as a propaganda ploy, McCain refused to play along, insisting that those captured first should be the first set free.

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