

BAKER BASEBALL, OTHER SPRING SPORTS, FACE PROSPECT OF LOSING ENTIRE SEASON

Diamond disappointment

By **Corey Kirk**
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Baker High School baseball players gathered around the batting cages, waiting for coach Tim Smith.

Senior Sam McCauley, one of the Bulldogs' returning pitchers, was struck by Smith's demeanor.

"I noticed he definitely seemed a little out of it," McCauley said.

Smith had to break news he never expected to tell his players, especially those, like McCauley, set to graduate in a few months.

The Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) had suspended all spring sports, including practices, through March 31 due to concerns about coronavirus.

But the news got worse on Wednesday. The OSAA, reacting to the Gov. Kate Brown's decision the day before to extend the school closure through April 28, followed suit.

"I think about the seniors all across the country," Smith said. "I feel for the kids."

Smith had been hosting organized practices for the Bulldogs' pitchers and catchers since the middle of February. After seeing the girls basketball team season end prematurely, Smith found out from the upper brass that spring sports were in jeopardy as well.



S. John Collins / Baker City Herald file photo

Sam McCauley bears down for a pitch against La Grande in April 2019.

"It's really frustrating to not get that extra year to develop your skills before you go onto college ball."

— **Baker senior pitcher Sam McCauley**

"They said their hands were tied," Smith said.

For the first time in six years, the Bulldogs, ranked 8th in the Class 4A preseason coaches poll, won't be traveling to Phoenix, Arizona, during spring break to compete in the Bob Pride Classic. That

leaves McCauley and his teammates feeling disappointed they can't compete against talent outside of this region.

"You get to start your season off by playing some really good team and it's a good team bonding experience being around each other for five days or so," McCauley said.

Smith knows how important this tournament is to his team, especially with the amount of time that was put into their fundraising.

"This was the first thing they thought of, that it

encompasses spring break," Smith said. "It's something that they work for."

As uncertainty loomed, Smith felt the need to make their last official practice, on March 12, a memorable one. He had both the varsity and JV players scrimmage rather than focus on the fundamentals.

"For players, it's one of those practices that we really love, a competitive practice," McCauley said. "It was fun."

Though frustrated with having to put their season on hold, especially for his senior

players, Smith felt that how the school and the district responded was justified due to the severity of the pandemic.

"I think it's one of those things that you are better off being proactive," Smith said. "They responded the way they had to."

The current closure will cancel at least 18 games on the Bulldogs' schedule.

Players can still practice but coaches can't be involved in any way.

As the team prepares for a season that may never be played, McCauley refuses to look at the spring with anything but optimism.

"There is no reason to stay negative," McCauley said. "We need to keep our heads up."

Still, he acknowledges that the potential loss of his final season in a Baker uniform is troubling — especially since his goal is to go on and play college baseball.

"Very frustrating," McCauley said. "I'd miss out on a year of baseball. It's really frustrating to not get that extra year to develop your skills before you go onto college ball."

Editor's note: The Herald will be talking with other Baker High School spring sports coaches and players about their thoughts regarding the potential cancellation of the entire spring season.

Waerner wins the Iditarod

By **Mark Thiessen**
Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Norwegian musher Thomas Waerner easily won the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race across Alaska, one of the few U.S. sporting events not canceled by concerns over the new coronavirus.

Waerner crossed the finish line in Nome, Alaska, early Wednesday morning.

"This is awesome," he told reporters at the finish line. "This is something special."

It took him 9 days, 10 hours, 37 minutes and 47 seconds to travel nearly 1,000 miles.

Waerner immediately thanked the 10 dogs in harness, petting and rubbing each, ending with his lead dogs, K2 and Bark. Then each dog got a snack.

Waerner called K2 "an amazing dog. He has this inside engine that never stops."

Fans didn't employ social distancing as they poured out of bars and hotels to cheer Waerner as he drove the team off the Bering Sea ice and down Front Street to the finish line under the famed burlled arch.

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