

Sports

New sports season begins for Baker

Traditional spring sports are playing, and athletic directors are working on plans for unofficial playoffs and state championships

By **Corey Kirk**
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No high school sports season can fairly be called normal during the pandemic, but it appears that at least some Baker High School athletes will have a chance to compete for an unofficial state title in their sports later this spring.

The Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA), which oversees prep sports in the state, is not sponsoring any regular playoffs or state championship events this spring.

Instead, athletic directors and coaches can set up whatever system works depending on the school, conference and classification level.

Oregon has six levels, ranging from the smallest schools in Class 1A, to the largest, in Class 6A. Baker is a member of Class 4A.

In late March the OSAA executive board decided to give school officials discretion on how to schedule the final week of competition for the season for traditional spring sports, which is underway.

That final week — OSAA calls it the “culminating week” — for baseball, softball, tennis, golf and track and field is May 17-22.

The situation was similar for traditional fall sports.

Baker’s cross-country teams competed at a state meet for Class 4A runners on April 10 in Eugene.

“The Board believes that providing local discretion for culminating week events allows schools to make the best decisions for their school and community,” OSAA Executive Director Peter Weber wrote in a memo.

With pandemic conditions, and state-imposed restrictions, varying among counties, OSAA officials decided that having traditional playoffs and championship events, which require schools to travel across the state in some cases, wasn’t feasible.

“OSAA-sponsored state championship events would require travel across the state for many schools and potentially include overnight stays depending on the sport, thus creating the type of largescale public events that the OHA and governor continue to advise against at this time,” Weber said.

Suzy Cole, who coaches Baker’s cross-country and track and field teams, said she supports the OSAA’s decision.

“I have never encountered an action they have made that has been anything but what they feel is 100 percent the best interest of the athlete,” Cole said. “They go to extremes that they research things, they have a pulse on the entire state and all the schools. So when they come out saying this is what we think is best, I respect it 100 percent.”

With the ball in school officials’ court, Buell Gonzales Jr., athletic director for the Baker School District, started laying out a blueprint to coaches of spring sports in a Zoom meeting April 6.

“There’s just not a one-size-fits-all, and the unique thing about the 4A classification is that it’s bigger but it’s not too big and it’s not too small,” Gonzales said. “There’s enough in the 4A classification where we can do a lot of this, we are spread out, it’s the perfect size, everything just worked out really well.”

Enrollment in Oregon’s 34 Class 4A high schools ranges from 355 (Elmira, near Eugene) to 1,118 (Woodburn), according to OSAA.

Baker is one of the smaller Class 4A schools, with an enrollment of about 408.

As was the case with the



S. John Collins/Baker City Herald File

Baker’s Gabbie Treblecock in a 2019 tennis match.

“I have a core group of kids that haven’t stopped training since last March, and have remained hopeful even when it’s been very grim.”

—Suzy Cole, Baker track and field coach

traditional fall sports, Baker teams mainly will compete against schools in Eastern Oregon.

In the case of sports that will have a state championship event, the officials from the four schools in the Greater Oregon League — Baker, La Grande, Ontario and MacHi — will determine the top two teams that would qualify, Gonzales said.

In the case of track and field, golf and tennis, individual performance is also important, as the top five competitors will have a chance to qualify for a season-ending event along with the top two teams.

Cole said the goal for track

and field is to arrange a state championship event similar to the cross-country state meet.

The track meet would take place at a Class 4A school, rather than the traditional venue of Hayward Field at the University of Oregon in Eugene. No date or site has been chosen.

“We are just having 4A at the meet to limit the size of participants and spectators,” Cole said.

She’s excited about the prospect of Baker athletes again having the chance to compete against their counterparts from Class 4A schools across the state.

“I’m super excited. I have a

Baker High School spring sports

SOFTBALL

April 17, at Ontario (2 games); April 20, vs. La Grande (2 games, 3 p.m., 5 p.m.); April 21, vs. Grant Union/Prairie City, 4 p.m.; April 27, vs. Nyssa, 5 p.m.; May 4, vs. Ontario, 4 p.m.; May 6, at La Grande (2 games); May 13, vs. Enterprise/Wallowa/Joseph (2 games, 3 p.m., 5 p.m.); May 15, at Nyssa (2 games)

BASEBALL

April 14, at Grant Union/Prairie City; April 16, vs. Heppner/lone (2 games, 3 p.m., 5 p.m.); April 17, vs. Ontario (2 games, noon, 2 p.m.); April 20, vs. La Grande (2 games, 3 p.m., 5 p.m.); April 27, vs. Nyssa (5 p.m.); May 1, vs. La Grande (2 games, 11 a.m., 1 p.m.); May 4, at Ontario; May 8, at La Grande (2 games); May 12, vs. Joseph/Enterprise/Wallowa/Elgin, 6 p.m.; May 15, at Nyssa (2 games)

GIRLS/BOYS TENNIS

April 16, at Ontario; April 19, vs. La Grande, 4 p.m.; April 22, at Vale; April 26, at Nyssa; April 30, at Four Rivers (Ontario); May 3, vs. Ontario, 4 p.m.; May 7, at La Grande; May 10, vs. Vale, 4 p.m.; May 14, vs. Nyssa, 4 p.m.

BOYS/GIRLS GOLF

April 19, Baker Invitational at Quail Ridge Golf Course; April 26, at Burns; May 3, at Ontario; May 10, at La Grande

TRACK AND FIELD

April 15, Baker Invitational; April 22, at Nyssa; April 29, at Burns; May 7, at La Grande; May 15, at Ontario

“They’re excited and we’re excited to coach but I reminded them that we have to enjoy what we are doing, we have to work hard, we have to take the COVID protocols seriously because this can be yanked out from under us just like it was a year ago.”

— Tim Smith, Baker High School baseball coach

different from other sports.

“I am not sure how they are going to work ours because we have a hybrid league, our league is Ontario, La Grande, Nyssa, Burns and Vale,” Smith said. “Two of those schools don’t even have varsity teams.”

Although he’s eager to return to the diamond for the first time in more than a year — the 2020 season was canceled while practices were underway but before the Bulldogs’ first game — Smith is expecting fewer players to turn out for baseball than in the past.

“I know our numbers at Baker High School for extracurricular activities are going to be low,” Smith said. “We anticipate having 20 to 21 players out for baseball; in a normal year we will have 30 to 35.

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core group of kids that haven’t stopped training since last March, and have remained hopeful even when it’s been very grim that they would still get a chance to compete,” Cole said.

Team sports

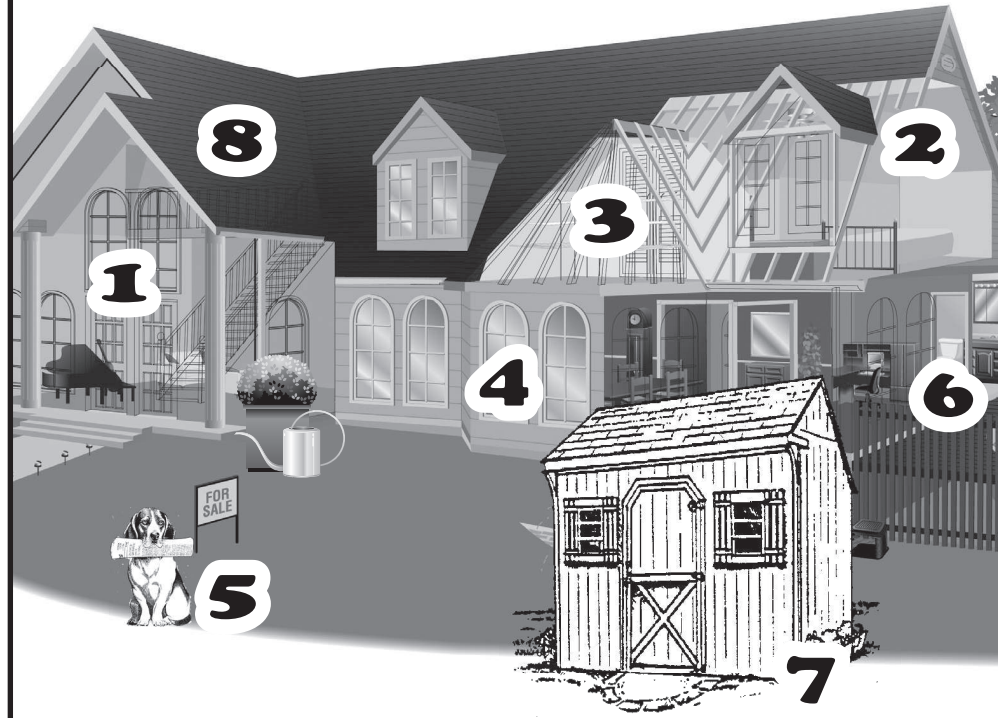
For baseball and softball, a committee comprising coaches from each of the six

Class 4A conferences will determine the schedule for competition between the top two teams from each conference.

Baker baseball coach Tim Smith will be a member of that committee for his sport.

Complicating the situation, he said, is that for baseball, the Greater Oregon League’s roster of teams is

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