

## BAKER VOLLEYBALL



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Baker Freshman Ashlyn Dalton (11) and Junior Makenzie Flanagan (2) attempt to block a Tiger's spike midway through the match.

## Bulldogs win Greater Oregon League title after defeating La Grande, 3-0

■ Baker Bulldogs varsity volleyball team secures their first league title since the 2017-2018 season

By COREY KIRK

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The Baker Bulldogs varsity girls volleyball team (14-5) walked away as the Greater Oregon League champions after sweeping the La Grande Tigers (5-6) 3-0 in a match on Thursday, Oct. 14, in La Grande.

The Bulldogs won the first set 25-19, the second set 25-23, and the third set 25-22.

Varsity Head Coach Ali Abrego was proud of her

team's efforts, and is excited for what will unfold for them in the postseason.

"It's been a while since we've won league or hosted a playoff game, and I am just very proud of the girls," Abrego said.

The last time the Bulldogs were GOL league champions was the 2017-2018 season. They end their regular season on the road as they take on the Mac-Hi Pioneers (5-5) next Thursday, Oct. 21. Tip-off will be at 6:30 p.m.

# HBO documentary 'The Weight of Gold' shows grim realities of Olympic athletes

As I panned through the main menu of HBO Max, something caught my attention. It involved Michael Phelps, one of the most famous Olympic athletes who has also been a prominent mental health advocate. Pressing "play" was an easy decision.

I began to watch HBO's "The Weight of Gold" documentary.

My expectations were exceeded with each passing minute. Phelps was the focus, but what I enjoyed most about the documentary is that it featured the perspectives of many other Olympians. They talked about their love for their sports, training for their moment of competitive glory, the overwhelming experience of partaking in the spectacle of the Olympics, and the potential outcome that follows. Phelps pondered that from his own journey.

"If your whole life was about building up to one race, one performance, or one event, how does that sustain everything that comes afterwards?" he said. "Eventually, for me at least, there was one question that hit me like a ton of bricks: Who was I outside of the swimming pool?"

What fans of the Olympics tend to forget is the



COREY KIRK

long interval — four years — between these athletes' chance to have career- or life-defining moments.

What happens if, after all that preparation, they fail to reach the medal podium?

Former American skier Jeremy Bloom talked about that in "The Weight of Gold."

"Unless you're an Olympic athlete, it's difficult to understand when you fail at the Olympics, what a big deal that is," Bloom said. "From an outside perspective, you can say, 'Oh, big deal. You're an Olympian. People have bigger problems.' And that is true. But for Olympians, that's your life. That's really what defines you."

After the talk of the Olympics was over, the meat and potatoes of the documentary focused on the mental health of these athletes. Phelps describes it as, "Post-Olympic Depression," where these athletes face their own perceived inadequacies and struggle to keep their dreams alive.

A huge component to this is the ability to profit off of your work, because winning doesn't always guarantee financial stability. Olympic

hurdler/bobsledder Lolo Jones said that while she was training, she earned roughly \$7,000 a year, and at one point she nearly lost her health insurance.

Phelps, recognizing that his slew of sponsorships helped him solely focus on his craft, said his fellow swimmers received a stipend of \$1,700 per month. Many Olympic hopefuls are struggling financially to make ends meet.

"The whole thought that going to the Olympics, and especially if you win a medal, sets you up for life, is such horse (expletive)," former Olympic figure skater Gracie Gold said in the documentary.

"The Weight of Gold" also touches on the trauma some of these athletes endure, referring to these as the "side effects" of being an Olympian. The biggest point they touch on is depression and suicidal ideation. Led by Phelps, athletes talked about how they can't endure the consistent pressure they are under, and the loss of other athletes who end up completing suicide because of it.

What hits you the hardest as a viewer is how one of the athletes being interviewed unfortunately passed away as well. Steve Holcomb, a member of the US bobsled

team, didn't even live long enough to see the documentary be completed.

I immediately felt my heart sink to the pit of my stomach.

What these athletes go through eliminates this facade that being an Olympian is idealistic. These athletes train vigorously, are paid next to nothing, and struggle with mental health. Phelps is quick to mention that Olympic athletes often hide their pain, but there is a dire need to take care of them and the traumas they are enduring.

"I don't think that they're maliciously ignoring our well-being, I just don't know that they realize it's, like, a full crisis yet," Gold says. "How many more dead Olympians do they need before they realize that there might be an epidemic here?"

In response to the recent turn of events, the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee announced the creation of a Mental Health Taskforce in April of 2020 to support Team USA athletes.

After watching this documentary I can only hope they are ready to put the work in. These athletes deserve it.

Corey Kirk is sports editor for the Baker City Herald.

## Pac-12 aiming to build on 2021 NCAA Tournament run

By JOHN MARSHALL

AP Basketball Writer

The Pac-12 had been an afterthought in the NCAA Tournament in recent years, the number of qualifying teams dwindling, the deep runs into the bracket rare.

The conference took a big turn last season with three teams reaching the Elite

Eight and UCLA playing in the Final Four, changing national perceptions while boosting confidence around the league.

Now it's time to take that next step of consistently doing well in March.

"I'm really excited for the league with what we accomplished at the NCAA Tournament," Arizona State

coach Bobby Hurley said Wednesday, Oct. 13 from Pac-12 media day in San Francisco. "It's what we've been talking about in head coaches' meetings for years. To have that success translate in the NCAA Tournament. Our conference, people are viewing us different because of that success. We have good momentum."

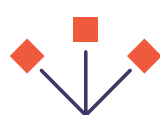
The Pac-12 was arguably the best conference in last year's tournament, going 13-5. UCLA, Southern California and Oregon State all reached the Elite Eight. The Bruins were seconds away from reaching the NCAA championship game, losing to Gonzaga on Jalen Suggs' banked-in running 3-point-er at the buzzer.

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